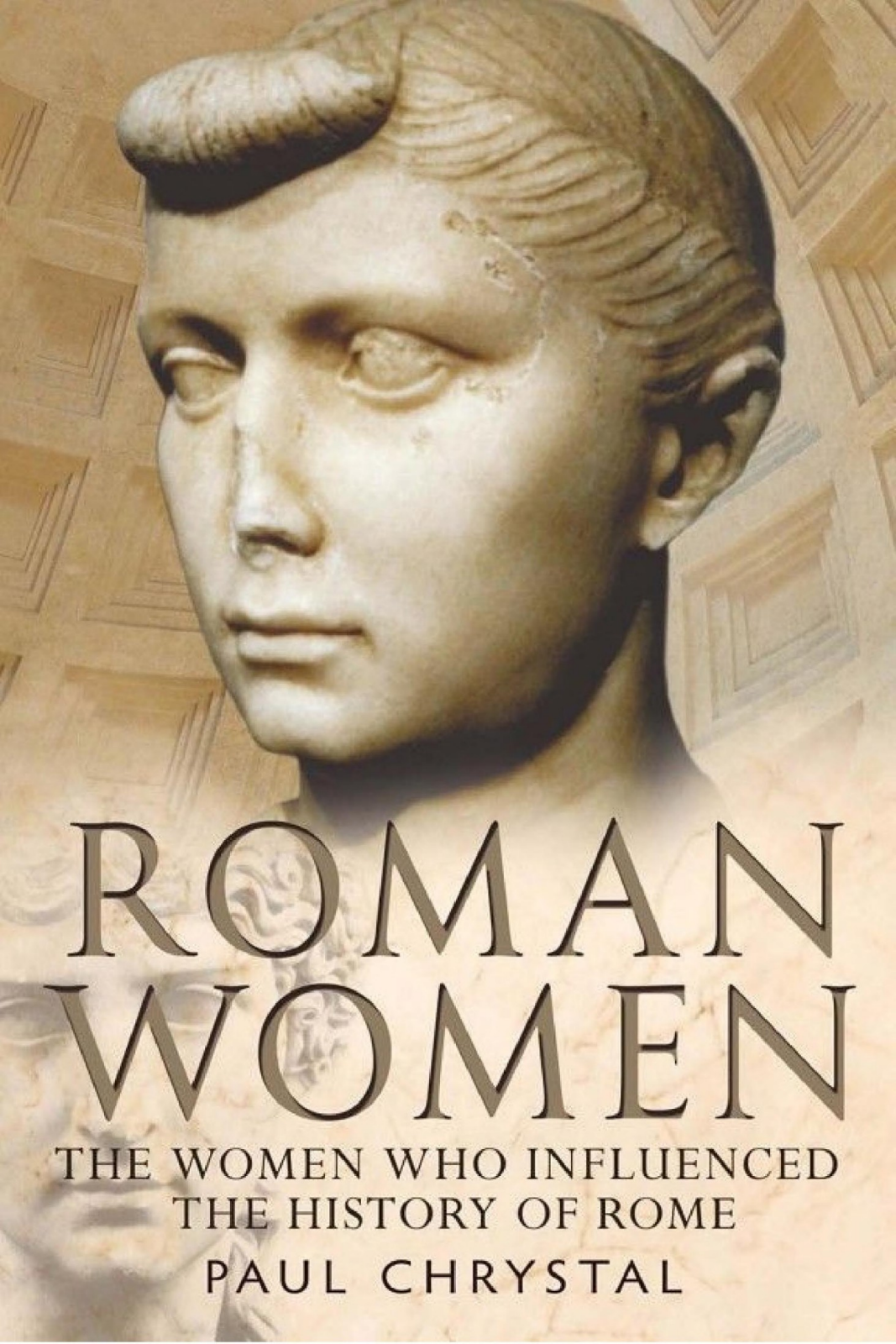




ROMAN WOMEN

THE WOMEN WHO INFLUENCED
THE HISTORY OF ROME

PAUL CHRYSTAL

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For Rachael and Rebecca—filiae delicatae

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On a personal note, I thank my wife Anne, who has once again put up with my overlong preoccupation with other women—ancient and difficult Roman women, that is.

As with my earlier book, *Women in Ancient Rome*, I have tried to be as vivid and stimulating as possible with the illustrations. Most books published on Roman women are graced with interesting photographs—familiar faces gaze out to us through the centuries, so much so that we now feel that we know some of them personally. I have illustrated this book with less-familiar images, using pictures taken from postcards, trade cards, and from books published in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These, I hope, will provide a different take on Roman women while still being instructive, refreshing, and exciting.

Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

Paul Chrystal, York February 2015
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About the Author

Paul Chrystal was educated at the Universities of Hull and Southampton, where he took degrees in Classics. He has been in medical publishing for thirty-five years, but now combines this with writing features for national newspapers and appearing regularly on BBC local radio and on the BBC World Service. He is the author of forty or so books on a wide range of subjects, including histories of York and other places in northern Britain, the Rowntree family, the social history of chocolate, the British infatuation with the cup of tea, classical literature, and classical social history. He is married, with three children, and lives in the Roman city of York. His book *Women in Ancient Rome* was published in 2013, *Wars and Battles of the Roman Republic* was published in 2014, and *In Bed with the Romans* is due to be published in 2015.

Introduction

The story of women in Ancient Rome provides for exciting and dramatic history. Apart from the glimpse it gives us into one of the world's greatest civilisations, it allows us to meet a host of good, bad, and dissolute women who had a huge impact on that civilisation and the men who ran it. These were exceptional women; they were flamboyant, frightening, dangerous, exciting, execrable, or admirable. This book describes eighteen of them, as well as the college of Vestal Virgins. It examines their significance in Roman history, politics, and society, and their often underestimated role in what was very much a man's world. In addition, a number of less-famous women are also described, alongside their actions and their influence on all aspects of Roman life, as they too contributed enormously to the story of Rome's women of influence. To this end, we will encounter Chelidon, Fannia, Julia the Younger, Lollia Paulina, Marcia, Porcia, Poppaea, Sulpicia, and Urgulania—to name just a few.

Women, like slaves and children, were second-class citizens, on the margins of society. They were—at least technically—always under the control of a man, be it father, husband, or guardian, depending on the time and their circumstances. They were barred from holding public office and excluded from the Roman war machine, they were politically invisible because they had no vote, and they had limited say in state religion. From what survives of Roman literature they are largely silent; their education was often limited by early marriage, by looking after the household, and by serial childbirth. John Chrysostom, the 4th century AD Archbishop of Constantinople, looked back on Greek, Roman, and Christian attitudes to women in *The Type of Women Who Ought to be Taken as Wives*:

A woman's role exclusively is to care for children, for her husband, and for her home.... God assigned a role to each of the sexes: women look after the home, men take care of public affairs, business and military matters—in other words, everything outside the home.

He echoed the words of Livy at the end of the 1st Century BC. Livy exemplifies the standard male attitude when he describes the debate on the repeal of the Oppian Law in 195 BC—a rare example of female power exerting itself in Roman politics:

Women cannot hold magistracies, priesthoods, celebrate triumphs, wear badges of office, enjoy gifts, or booty; elegance, finery, and beautiful clothes are women's emblems, this is what they love and are proud of, this is what our ancestors called women's world of adornment (*hunc mundum muliebre*

appellarunt maiores nostri)'.¹

'Let them go shopping,' no less. According to Philo of Alexandria, who was writing soon after Livy, woe betide any woman who acts immoderately—indeed, acts like a man—even in defence of a husband under attack:

If any woman, hearing that her husband is being assaulted, being out of her affection for him carried away by love for her husband, should yield to the feelings which overpower her and rush forth to aid him, still let her not be so audacious as to behave like a man, outrunning the nature of a woman; but even while aiding him let her continue to be a woman. For it would be a very terrible thing if a woman, being desirous to deliver her husband from an insult, should expose herself to insult, by exhibiting human life as full of shamelessness and liable to great reproaches for her incurable boldness; for shall a woman utter abuse in the marketplace and give vent to unlawful language? And if another man uses foul language, will not she stop her ears and run away?

For Philo, things have already gone too far:

But as it is now, some women are advanced to such a pitch of shamelessness as not only, though they are women, to give vent to intemperate language and abuse among a crowd of men, but even to strike men and insult them, with hands practised rather in works of the loom and spinning than in blows and assaults ... but that is a shocking thing if a woman were to proceed to such a degree of boldness as to seize hold of the genitals of one of the men quarrelling.... And let the punishment be the cutting off of the hand which has touched what it ought not to have touched.²

Plautus, writing comedic plays, had earlier said that there was nothing more miserable than a woman: *miserius nihil est quam mulier*. One assumes that this raised a laugh, and (as he was a well-to-do Roman man) that he was referring to a woman's psychological mood rather than her social situation—although both are probably appropriate, with the latter often accounting for the former.³ A nostalgic Cicero had already famously said:

Our ancestors, in their wisdom, wanted all women, because of their feebleness, to be in the power of guardians.⁴

This guardian would always be a man—her father and then her husband, or, where the father or husband died prematurely, a male relative appointed by will or by the state. In the 2nd century AD not much had changed, with Martial enigmatically asserting that the *matrona* will never be equal to men unless she remains *inferior marito* (subject to her husband).⁵

All the more impressive, then, the achievements and impacts of the

women who did break through this ancient glass ceiling. These women were paradoxes; they were conspicuous, assertive, and influential, all the things that Roman women were not supposed to be. By the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire, they assumed levels of power and responsibility—either directly or indirectly, through male politicians and Emperors—which were unimaginable less than a century beforehand.

It is important to remember how we receive our knowledge about these women. Firstly, our picture of Roman women is almost always seen through (and distorted by) the prism of middle class, educated, or powerful men. The silent women of Rome remain inaudible. To add to this implicitly biased approach, descriptions of women and their actions are often refracted through the action and achievements of men, from the margins of a male world. What the historians tell us about what Roman women said and did is, therefore, a kind of ricochet—almost second-hand and derivative, and often adapted to accommodate the desired description of the man and his actions.

Secondly, until around 200 BC—some 500 years after the founding of Rome, in 753 BC—there was little or no historiography. This only began with the work of Quintus Fabius Pictor and Marcus Porcius Cato, and then with Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus at the end of the Republic. In the absence of actually verifiable facts, much of the early history of Rome (including descriptions of notable women) was formed from ideals and stereotypes based on legends and stories, many of which were manipulated to fit the historian's agenda. The stories of Lucretia, Verginia, and even to some extent Cornelia, were written by men who portrayed the days of old just how they wanted them to be.⁶ Some of these writers have political axes to grind; all of them come to their subject with preconceptions and stereotypical attitudes about women. The more a woman stepped beyond what was considered decorum, the more likely she was to incur male invective—be it in history, satire, or even love poetry.

Livy, Tacitus, Dio, Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, Suetonius, Catullus, Horace, Juvenal, and all the others had their own ways of seeing women and womanliness. For example, in Livy and Tacitus, the word for 'womanly' (*'muliebris'*) is nearly always used in a pejorative context: Livy uses it when he indignantly describes Tullius's sister and Tullia in her impudent role as kingmaker; the presumptuous delegation of *matronae* that confronts Coriolanus is motivated by 'womanly fear' (*'muliebris timor'*); the outraged supporters of Verginia are driven by 'womanly grief' (*'muliebris dolor'*); and the mass poisonings of 331 BC are driven by 'womanly guile' (*'muliebris fraus'*). Tacitus echoes the phrase when describing the murder of Germanicus. Livy uses it to describe the outcry against the *Lex Oppia*—'womanly mayhem' (*'consternatio muliebris'*) leading to 'womanly lack of self-control' (*'impotentia muliebris'*), responsible for destroying men's freedoms. Tacitus again echoes *'impotentia muliebris'*, verbatim, with his descriptions of feminine abandon in the Principate; the Imperial palace was riddled with

‘womanly bitching’ (*muliebris offensiones*). Conspicuous by its absence in Livy is the ‘womanly episode’ when Roman *matronae* patriotically cashed in their gold to pay for bowstrings made from their hair, in the battles against the invading Gauls in 390 BC.

It is also important to remember that writers have a tendency towards the exciting, the sensational, and the salacious; this tabloid approach entertains the reader, and does wonders for the reputation of the historian, but it may also distort and exaggerate the truth. Stereotyping is another problem; many of the conspicuous women we meet are defined in terms of their sexual *mores* or their deficient femininity—or both. The flamboyant Sempronia, Fulvia, Clodia, the mistresses of Propertius, Tibullus, and Horace, Julia and Agrippina the Younger, and even Cornelia are all slurred by male politicians or writers. Powerful women have ignited a sense of insecurity and often hypocritical misogyny in their male counterparts, which has found expression in hostile and derogatory references to a woman’s sexual conduct. As women could not be charged with offences against the state, treason (*maiestas*), or staging a coup (*occupandae rei publicae*), the next best thing was an allegation of sexual impropriety or lewdness (*impudicia* or *stuprum*).⁸ There are multiple examples of charges of immorality made against prominent women, many of which are pure calumny. Similarly, exceptional achievements by women are often explained away as masculine behaviour—the outstanding woman is exceptional because she exhibits male qualities, and she is, therefore, effectively defeminised, as much a man as a woman. The women in question may be seen as a promiscuous *viragos* but, in the eyes of the commentators, their eminence is unquestionably due to their non-*matrona*, masculine behaviour.

The Bacchanalian riots of 186 BC are a good example of the hysteria and prejudice amongst male commentators. According to some historians, women were largely to blame for the unrest—but the evidence confirms that men and women were equally culpable. The cult of Bacchus was originally exclusively female, and famous for its harmless ostentation; the frenzied shrieking of its adherents, the cacophonous banging of drums and the clashing of cymbals, and dressing up flamboyantly were all very un-Roman. The cult had a huge popular appeal amongst women even before men were admitted. The rite was a relatively relaxed and benign affair, with daytime celebrations three times a year, and the priestesses were dependable *matronae*. Cicero argued for no change; nocturnal rites and initiation should be illegal for women, if only in order to protect their reputations.⁹ Things changed dramatically when a Campanian priestess called Paculla Annia began initiating men—the rites were moved to night-time performances, they began taking place a more-frequent five times a month, and membership was restricted to people aged twenty and under.

Livy described its spread as an epidemic which excited sexual emotion in women.¹⁰ Plutarch tells us that frenzied women went straight for the ivy,

chewing on it to bring on ‘a wineless drunkenness and joyousness; [it] has an exciting and distracting breath of madness, deranges persons, and agitates them’—a veritable rave.¹¹ Officially, the rite was seen as the manifestation of an unsettling conspiracy against Rome; one of the founding Etruscan initiates was suspected of occult activity, mysterious nocturnal sacrifices, and soothsaying. The 7,000 members were bound by an oath (*coniuratio*) which committed them to fornication and crime. The heady mix of wine, darkness, women, and men was explosive, resulting in *orgia* on a grand scale—providing a springboard for perjury, forgery, poisoning, and murder. Traditionalists saw the initiation of men as tantamount to removing them from their rightful place in the sanctity of the home (*domus*), the family (*familia*), and the state.

This all came to a head in 186 BC, when Publius Aebutius was targeted by his greedy stepfather; with the boy’s mother, Duronia, he conspired to dispose of Aebutius by enrolling him in the Bacchanalia, such was its life-limiting reputation for the destruction of life itself. The horrified girlfriend of Aebutius, Hispala Faecina, was a freedwoman and reforming prostitute who had witnessed the orgiastic rites as an initiate, and she dissuaded him from joining. The hazards of the cult were notorious; ritual male rape was routine, while any show of resistance or opposition resulted in summary sacrifice. On the advice of his aunt, Aebutia, Aebutius reported the matter to the consul, Spurius Postumius Albinus—whose wife, Sulpicia, then interviewed Aebutia and Hispala to establish the integrity of their accusations. Understandably reluctant at first, Hispala eventually agreed to reveal all, taking up residence in Postumius’ house for her own personal safety. Livy, through Postumius, lays the blame for the anarchy squarely at the feet of women—although he does concede that some men were also involved—and suggests that exposure to the Bacchanalia made men effeminate and unsuitable for the Roman Army.¹²

The outcome of the investigation was that 7,000 Bacchanates were prosecuted under the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, legislation specially enacted to deal with the chaos and still extant. Many of the accused fled Rome or committed suicide.¹³ A manhunt ensued, and imprisonments and executions followed; many of the convicted women were handed over to their *paterfamilias* (head of the family) for their kin to dispense justice. Most of the Bacchic shrines in Rome and throughout Italy were then destroyed, with Hispala Faecina and Aebutius handsomely rewarded. Hispala and Aebutius were awarded 100,000 sesterces; he received exemption from military service, and she was given free-born status and its benefits. The anxiety generated by the cult (and particularly its female adherents) was matched by the desperation and relief of the authorities at having suppressed it.¹⁴

The commentators also tend to see murder and mystery everywhere conspicuous women are involved, with their preferred weapon being poison. It is impossible to know whether Livia and Agrippina the Younger really did murder all the men they have been given credit for, or whether they always

used toxicology; however, it soon became an essential theme in the many scenarios in which a woman murders a man or boy. The association between women and poisoning has a long tradition—Livy describes the poisonings in the poison trials of 331 BC as being ‘a woman’s crime’ (*muliebris fraus*).¹⁵ One hundred and seventy *matronae* were convicted of poisoning leading politicians after another female whistle-blower, a slave woman (*ancilla*), reported them to aedile Q. Fabius Maximus—in return for immunity and protection. Twenty of these *matronae* were caught red-handed; when the patrician women Cornelia and Sergia protested that their concoctions were innocent medical remedies (*medicamenta* rather than *venena*), they were invited to drink them to prove their innocence. They did, and promptly dropped down dead. The rest were probably executed (*damnatae*), and their property confiscated. These were Rome’s first major convictions for poisoning (*quaestio de veneficiis*) and, significantly, they were tried in the public courts rather than the usual domestic setting. It seems, however, that poisoning was nothing new; the 331 BC murders were officially put down to bad omens and madness rather than wickedness. Tacitus describes the poisoning of Germanicus, 340 years later, with the same two words (*muliebris fraus*), pointing the finger at Livia Drusilla.¹⁶

Poisoning is but a short step away from witchcraft with its potions and spells—and there lies another stereotype. Witches, like prostitutes, stepmothers (*novercae*), and procuresses (*lenae*), were vilified and excoriated by writers. Very often charges laid against women (sometimes by other women) of practising sorcery and magic had little foundation. Where poisoning and the occult were not implicated, adultery and inebriation amongst women often were.

Our knowledge of influential women is necessarily largely confined to elite women, or women from the upper and middle classes. We do have a limited amount of information about how the vast majority of the women in the lower classes lived—mainly from epitaphs—but, as may be expected, in the main these women are anonymous and silent. If they were influential in any way then their influence was restricted to the home, and it has therefore, for the most part, gone unrecorded.

The paradigm and essence of Roman womanhood lay in the *matrona*: the wife and woman of the household. The *matrona* was the glue which held the Roman family together, and provided the offspring essential to the running of the farm or business, the recruits needed for bar and battlefield, and the ever-burgeoning administration at home and in overseas provinces and dependencies. The qualities expected of a *matrona* are best identified in the inscriptional evidence, where there are multiple examples of *pudicitia* (sexual propriety, almost the opposite of *stuprum*), modesty, virtuousness, loyalty, docility, unobtrusiveness, strength of character and fortitude, *pietas* towards the family, stay-at-home, one-man women (*univira*), and devotion to children. The ability to run the home (*domum servat*) and work the wool (*lanem fecit*)

became badges of the *matrona*, and symbolised her domesticity and management of the household.¹⁷ A girl, often in her teens, would take on these responsibilities the minute she arrived at her new husband's house during the wedding ceremony; for the rest of her life, she would be judged on how far she complied with this paradigm. The famously virtuous *matronae* of Rome—Lucretia, Verginia, Cornelia, Aurelia Cotta—and their influence down the centuries will be described in Chapter One.

As we have noted, working the wool was an emblem of the good Roman *matrona*. This tradition survives from the dawn of classical literature with Homer; a number of his heroines work the wool, including Penelope, Circe, Helen, Andromache, and Arete, as well as non-elite women. In *Alcibiades*, Plutarch has Socrates point out to Alcibiades that wool is women's work and war is man's work. A reversal of these roles can be seen in Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, where the heroine claims a stake in war for women, and in his *Birds*, where Athena stands guard in armour while Cleithenes has his shuttle. Diodorus describes Libyan men staying at home, weaving and looking after the children, while Herodotus makes a similar observation in Egypt, where the world is turned on its head. Sophocles makes Oedipus have the women out of the house and away from the loom, gathering the food; Pindar's Cyrene would prefer to go hunting, as would Euripides' Ague—who sees desertion of the loom as self-improvement. Hipparchia leaves weaving behind for the study of philosophy, according to Diogenes Laertius.¹⁸

The strictures that kept women in place—loyalty and docile observance of the traditional roles of the *matrona*—slowly receded over the years, so that by the beginning of the first century BC the binding *manus* form of marriage was all but obsolete, and women could marry as freer agents. Their ability to inherit, bequeath, and own land and property, and to inherit and bequeath wealth, provided a level of financial independence and security—as did widowhood, which was increasingly caused by the endless casualties of war. The roles of and the insistence on guardians also seems to have diminished by this time. Husbands were absent for extended periods of time, fighting increasingly distant wars and organising overseas territories, and this inculcated increasing levels of independence amongst the women left behind to head the family.

Another consequence of the warring was the influx of foreign booty, wealth, and slaves with all sorts of skills; these included doctors, midwives, astrologers, prostitutes, and teachers. Exotic culture began to percolate into the hoary Roman traditions, as Spanish dancers, Greek actors and mimes, musicians, multilinguists, and educated and urbane women (*doctae puellae*) all arrived, with minds, bodies, and opinions of their own. The old way of doing things (the *mos maiorum*) was now seriously compromised, despite the best efforts of conservatives like Cato the Younger to shore it up. All this opened up the doors for women to express themselves, exerting a degree of independence and public conspicuousness that would have been unheard of a

few years earlier.

A good example of this is the occasion when *matronae* living in or within 10 miles of Rome were called upon to expiate some rather sinister prodigies in 207 BC. Showers of stones fell at Veii and Armilustrum; at Meturnae, the temple of Jupiter and the sacred grove of Marica were struck by lightning; a stream of blood flowed through the gate at Menturna; and a wolf mauled one of the night guards at Capua. Most alarming, however, was the birth of a hermaphrodite the size of a four-year-old child; this repellent monster was cast adrift in a box, drowning in the sea, but not before twenty-seven girls were recruited to sing a hymn composed by Livius Andronicus. During a rehearsal, a bolt of lightning struck the temple of Juno Regina. Further expiation and appeasement was necessary, and twenty-five of the local *matronae* made contributions from their dowries to pay for a golden bowl, which was gifted to Juno. However, Livy was not impressed, calling the hymn at the ceremony ‘crude and vulgar’ by the standards of his day.¹⁹

Sophisticated and educated women with talents in the fine arts, celebrated by Catullus, the *poetae novae*, and by the love elegists, feature in Chapter Two. Sempronia and Lesbia are typical *doctae puellae*—they are as refined and as intelligent as any man, but they invariably incur male scorn as a consequence. Hortensia is a notable orator, whose expertise was universally recognised as being equal to a man’s. Sempronia and Lesbia are not just unusually cultured though—Sempronia exhibits political independence by her implication in Catiline’s conspiracy, Lesbia (the real-world Clodia) not only *dominates* Catullus, but also allegedly poisons her husband and commits incest with her brother (poison and incest are themes we will pick up in Chapter Six). Clodia’s legal action inspired Cicero to mount an excoriating attack on her in the *Pro Caelio*.

Sempronia and Clodia were not just typical of the new urbane and educated Roman woman, but they were also the first women to wield political power and influence over their men. At the end of the Republic we can identify another crucial way in which Roman women were able to assert this indirect influence in Roman politics; daughters, sisters, nieces, and even wives were increasingly used as pawns in the political power-plays orchestrated by their fathers, brothers, uncles, and husbands. A woman’s assumed fertility, and her potential marriageability, gave her a significant role in cementing political alliances in the machinations of the first century BC. This paved the way for the powerful mothers, wives, and mistresses of the early Principate, who devoted themselves to king-making, building up their own bases of power, or engineering power for their sons.

This merry-go-round of political marriage is well-illustrated by a glance at the five wives of Pompey. Antistia was his first wife, the daughter of a praetor called Antistius whom Pompey impressed when defending himself against a charge of possessing stolen goods in 86 BC. Antistius offered Pompey his daughter’s hand, and Pompey accepted, but things ended badly; Antistia’s

father was executed because of his connection with Pompey, and her bereft mother committed suicide. In 82 BC Sulla persuaded Pompey to divorce Antistia so that he could marry his stepdaughter, Aemilia. Aemilia was pregnant by her husband, M. Acilius Glabrio, and reluctant to marry Pompey; she eventually did, but died in childbirth. Q. Mucius Scaevola was the father of Pompey's third wife, Mucia Tertia, whom he married in 79 BC. Their marriage lasted until 62 BC, and during this time they had a daughter, Pompeia, and two sons, Gnaeus and Sextus. According to Asconius, Plutarch, and Suetonius, Mucia was unfaithful—Suetonius and Cicero allege she had an affair with Caesar—and Pompey divorced her. In 59 BC Pompey married Caesar's daughter Julia, who was already engaged to Q. Servilius Caepio. Caepio took umbrage, so Pompey offered him his own daughter in Julia's place—although Pompeia was engaged to Sulla's son, Faustus, at the time. Julia miscarried soon after fainting at seeing blood-stained clothing, which she had taken to indicate that her husband had been killed. In 54 BC Julia fell pregnant again, but died in childbirth; her infant daughter died a few days later. Pompey's fifth wife was Cornelia, daughter of Metellus Scipio and the widow of Publius Crassus.

The Vestal Virgins enjoyed special privileges, which set them apart from Roman women. Their unique, highly visible role in public life—and their occasional lapses in chastity—are dealt with in Chapter Three. Their extraordinary privileges were to be extended to prominent women in the Imperial households of the early empire.

The politically ambitious and influential women in Chapter Four are Terentia, Fulvia, Livia, and Octavia. They all married powerful men, and were (significantly) able to exert power and authority over them. The Republic, and the order that it had brought with it, was now in disarray—men and women were able to exploit the power vacuums as battles raged for power (*imperium*) and authority (*auctoritas*). Women had never previously been able to demonstrate such influence, with Terentia supporting Cicero in political and commercial matters, not just the domestic, and Fulvia being a tireless and aggressive agitator for Antony—a forerunner of the politically astute and sometimes militaristic women of the early Principate. During the Principate, Livia worked less obtrusively, but no less powerfully, behind the scenes, formulating policy with Augustus and clearing the decks for the accession of her son, Tiberius. Antonia Minor was at once a role-model *matrona* and a powerful influence on Caligula and Claudius—for good or bad.

This increasing prominence was mirrored by two honours (traditionally the preserve of outstanding men) which began to be bestowed on women of merit and achievement: the eulogy (*laudatio*) and the funeral ode (*epicedium*). Cicero tells us how Lutatius Catulus started the tradition in 102 BC with an encomium for his mother, Popilia.²⁰ In 69 BC Julius Caesar eulogised his aunt, Julia Caesaris, the virtuous wife of Marius. In 68 BC he similarly praised Cornelia Cinnilla, his late first wife—the first public eulogy for a

younger woman. Nothing was ever done for free, however—both actions won him popular and political kudos. Cicero and Varro delivered funeral orations for Porcia, Cato's sister and the widow of L. Domitius Ahenobarbus. At the age of twelve, Octavian delivered a *laudatio* for his grandmother, Julia. When Octavia (the sister of Augustus) died, two orations were delivered: one by Augustus, and another by Nero Claudius Drusus, followed by public mourning.

Women also became subjects of the literary *epicedium*. In one respect this is something of an extended funerary inscription, where much of the praise is obviously formulaic and conventional. The enduring effect, nevertheless, is to bestow eternal recognition on the subject; Propertius' Cornelia and, in the first century AD, Statius' Priscilla both benefitted from *epicedia*.²¹⁻²² Cornelia was a *univira* to Lucius Aemilius Paullus, who brought honour to his life achievements, his *res gestae*; indeed, she was a credit to his lineage as the perfect *matrona*. She was calm (*quies*), modest (*modesta*), and her table was simple (*modica*). While never entirely altruistic, these testimonials still marked a significant step forward in the public recognition of notable and worthy women.

More exposure followed; Fulvia was honoured by Antony, who struck coins bearing her image in around 43 BC, as a representation of Victory—the first time that Roman coinage had featured a woman. Antony's supporters in Eumenia, Phrygia, renamed the city Fulviana—another first. In the provinces, the wives of governors were celebrated in statuary, and in time the statues were replaced by the real thing; Caecilia Metella led the way when she accompanied her husband, Sulla, to Athens in 86 BC. In 49 BC Cornelia Metella (c. 73–48 BC) went to Lesbos and Egypt with Pompey.

Armed with expanding personal wealth and exploiting their dynastic credentials, some women were becoming confident enough to take the initiative in winning independence, networking, and acquiring power. The high-born Valeria just happened to bump flirtatiously into Sulla at the games, and ended up marrying him; the sophisticated and beautiful Praecia bewitched Cornelius Cethegus to such an extent that she had to approve his every action. In 74 BC the consul for that year, Lucullus, bribed her to work for him, and she secured a command in Cilicia for him.²³ Chelidon, mistress to the corrupt Verres (governor of Sicily 73–70 BC), exploited their intimate relationship to build her power at his expense. According to Cicero, lawsuits and maintenance contracts were settled for a price demanded by Chelidon, and she was also not above skimming dispute settlements. If she disapproved of a judgement by Verres, a word in his hear would lead to a retrial and a revised ruling. She was in demand, and took business away from her male competitors in the legal and property markets, with people flocking to her as the source for the latest legislation and legal precedents. Cicero cannot resist reminding us that she was also working as a prostitute.²⁴

The role of women—be they wives, mistresses, or mothers—became

increasingly significant at the heart of government during the Republic. They were still disenfranchised, with no direct access to public office, but these elite women were able to offset their lack of non-domestic influence by exploiting the monarchical system—which not only required an Emperor but also permitted a *de facto* Empress. Augustus disbanded the old, aristocratic, class-based system which favoured the senatorial and equestrian classes, and threw open the doors of political influence to virtually anyone savvy enough (or sufficiently sycophantic) to catch the Emperor's ear. This included freedmen and women. Furthermore, the increasing bureaucracy—a Roman civil service, if you like—caused by a burgeoning empire enabled freedmen to impress, to excel in their various departments, and to move closer to the seat of power by deploying various levels of loyalty and obsequiousness. Narcissus and Pallas, both closely associated with Antonia, Messalina, or Agrippina the Younger, are prime examples of the highly-successful Imperial freedman.

The importance of the Senate and the male *cursus honorum* was now considerably diluted, and women's exclusion from public and political office became a less-significant impediment. Women in general were now officially on a par with the vast majority of Roman men who never even hoped to enter public service. They still had no vote, they could not pursue a military career, and they could not enter the Senate, but the elite could now express opinions and offer advice that—while not always taken on board—was frequently sought. Moreover, wives, mothers, and sisters were now an integral part of an elite of elites; they were integral to the Imperial family, and they were unavoidably implicated in the agonising machinations which accompanied the dynastic succession of Emperors. Whether acting on their son's behalf or for self-serving reasons, the Imperial Roman lady became a crucial, pivotal force in the politics of the Imperial household (the *domum Caesarum*).

The qualities we observe in the sometimes libertine, always politically-powerful women in Chapters Two and Four presaged traits and actions clearly evident in the lives of Julia, the two Agrippinas, Poppaea, and in Messalina, as covered in Part Two. Ambition (whether personal or vicarious, through a son), dissipation (where it helped political advancement), Machiavellian scheming, and cold-blooded murder to ease the path of succession of sons, these all manifested themselves in one or other of the unscrupulous women. They were at the core of political power and in the Imperial bed during the Julio-Claudian period of the Roman Empire.

Roman Women provides a much-needed survey of influential women in Ancient Rome; it examines how they influenced their men and, through, them, the history of Rome during the Republic and the first years of the Empire. The good women emanate mainly from the misty, semi-legendary, air-brushed days of early Rome, setting the prescribed standards of behaviour and decorum for the successive generations of *matronae*. On the other hand, the conspicuous, assertive, ambitious, dissolute, and bad women were celebrated for their notoriety by men who became increasingly uncomfortable and

misogynistic. Some women abandoned their traditional roles as submissive, inadequately educated, and compliant semi-citizens and, against all the odds, exerted a more dominant and obtrusive role for themselves—despite the antipathy and anxiety it caused.

PART ONE

THE REPUBLIC

Paragons of Feminine Virtue: Lucretia, Verginia, Cornelia, and Aurelia Cotta

In the *Agricola*, published in AD 98, Tacitus describes Agricola's mother, Julia Procilla, as 'a paragon of feminine virtue' (*rara castitas*). It was her sound parenting which kept him out of bad company, and it was she who 'in her wisdom, tempered his ardent passion', enabling him to adopt a sense of proportion amidst the enfeebling, un-Roman, philosophizing characteristic of Massilia—a city steeped in all things Greek—where he was educated.¹ It was Julia Procilla who largely made Agricola the success he would become.² Significantly, Tacitus emphasises the personal, intimate aspect of Agricola's upbringing—*sinu indulgentiaque*—at a time when it was customary for middle class Roman women to farm out infants to wet nurses.³

This chapter describes five other paragons of female virtue who, like Julia Procilla, were regarded as role models for womanly conduct, the exemplars of the ideal Roman wife and mother, and the ideal *matrona*.

Lucretia (d. 510 BC)

Through a blend of legend and historical fact, brought to us by the historians Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, we know that Lucretia was the daughter of Spurius Lucretius Tricipitinus and the wife of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, a relative of Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, the last King of Rome. In around 510 BC, while Collatinus was assisting the king at the siege of Ardea, his son, Sextus Tarquinius, was in Collatina on official business. He went to the home of Lucretia, intent on having sex with her. With utter disregard for his obligations as a guest and a relative, he inveigled his way into her bedroom and threatened to kill her with his sword if she refused him; she resisted. To Lucretia, death was preferable to defilement by rape (which was also thereby committing adultery). Sextus Tarquinius then gave her a stark choice: either she submitted, and became his queen, or he would kill her and one of her male slaves, laying the bodies together in the bed to give the impression that she had been found *in flagrante* with the slave. His right to kill her with impunity for catching her in the act would be undeniable, since he was a relative. However, for a *matrona*, adultery alone was a bad-enough stain which would be made doubly shameful by consorting with a slave. Lucretia could not bear to allow such calumny to circulate after her death, so she relented and gave herself to Sextus Tarquinius.

Lucretia's credentials as a model of probity had been established at an earlier stage of the siege, when, during a drinking session which included Tarquinius and Collatinus, bets were laid as to the virtuousness of each man's wives. A drink-fuelled decision was made to ride back to Rome and Collatia, 23 miles south of the capital, to establish whose wife was the most virtuous by visiting them unannounced.

The wives of the princes were found enjoying a sumptuous dinner party (*in convivio luxuque*) where the wine was flowing freely. On reaching Collatia, despite the lateness of the hour, Lucretia was found working away at the wool by lamplight, surrounded by her maids in the hall. The essence of good matronly conduct was there for all to see, and it left no doubt as to who had won the wager; Lucretia was manifestly more virtuous. To the Romans of Livy's time, working the wool (*lanificium*) was synonymous with sexual propriety (*pudicitia*), a throwback to the times when homespun fabric was an essential facet of domestic life. According to Ovid, Lucretia was working on a cloak for Collatinus.⁴ Fatefully, Lucretia's beauty and virtue had not escaped the notice of Sextus Tarquinius (*cum forma tum spectate castitas*).⁵

Lucretia's body was defiled, but, she protested, her mind remained pure (*corpus est tantum violatum, animus insons*). Despite absolute forgiveness from her father and husband (ironically, two of the four people who would have made up the domestic court had there been a charge of adultery), she resolved to commit suicide—but only after she secured her husband's promise to kill Sextus Tarquinius in revenge. Lucretia stabbed herself, her final words asserting that her name would never be used scandalously by any unchaste woman (*inpudica*) seeking to avoid due punishment. To a good Roman *matrona*, adultery was the last word in defilement, polluting not just the perpetrator but any progeny too.

Lucretia, brave and virtuous, is now inextricably linked with Rome's proud early beginnings. She would rather die than be raped, but she would rather be raped than compromise her reputation and her *pudicitia*. Rome, like Lucretia, had been compromised and violated by the Tarquins. Her noble reaction, and the ensuing vengeful act of defeating the kings and abolishing the monarchy to establish the Republic, symbolises Rome's honourable struggle against regal tyranny. Some 500 years later, Livy makes her an unimpeachable exemplar of feminine virtue in his Rome, a city now beset by increasing adultery, the avoidance of marriage, and failure of marriages. The rape of a proud woman was the catalyst for a major constitutional change, just as it had been with the abduction of the Sabine women in around 750 BC (when the Romans seized the Sabine women and integrated them into their society). The inflammatory display of Lucretia's body in the Forum at Collatia by Lucius Junius Brutus, and the subsequent public clamour for justice, would have reminded Livy's audience of the equally revolutionary spectacle of Julius Caesar's corpse after his assassination—in which, of course, another Brutus was implicated.

Before Livy, Cicero had used the rape of Lucretia to illustrate that Tarquinius was guilty of a breach of eternal law and that he was morally guilty, despite the fact that there was no contemporary written law relating to adultery. In the *de Republica*, he describes Lucretia as ‘a chaste and noble woman’ (*mulierque pudens et nobilis*).⁶ In the second century AD, Martial—albeit cynically—makes Lucretia an exemplar of *gravitas* and chastity.⁷ However, in *De Civitate Dei* 1, Augustine questioned whether Lucretia ought to have carried out the wrong that was suicide over an event which she had no control over.

Lucretia became an icon, but it seems that many Roman men considered her qualities and virtues to be more masculine than feminine. She is defeminised by both Ovid and Valerius Maximus, who ascribe masculine qualities to her and her actions when praising her. To Ovid she is a *matrona* with a manly spirit (*animi matrona virilis*), and to Valerius Maximus she is ‘the leader in Roman sexual propriety’ (*dux Romanae pudicitiae*)—who, by a wicked twist of fate, possesses a man’s spirit in a female body’.⁸ ⁹ *Dux* usually describes a man; in two instances where Roman writers used it to describe a woman, it signifies two powerful, disturbing, and regal foreign women—Dido and Boudica. Apart from being reminiscent of three Roman taboos (monarchy, women, and foreigners), the implication is that Lucretia and her actions were almost too good to be those of a woman. As we shall see, Lucretia is not the only Roman woman to be denied her true gender by male writers.¹⁰

Verginia (d. 449 BC)

The death of Verginia in 449 BC had not dissimilar causes and ramifications. Her death occurred at a highpoint of the Conflict of the Orders—the struggle between the patricians and the plebeians during the decemvirate—an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to reorganise Roman administration and codify the law (which found voice as the enduring *Twelve Tables*), while all other magistracies were suspended and decisions were not subject to appeal. In this case, the actions of Verginia’s father Verginius provoked a secession of the plebeians, precipitated the abolition of the decemvirate, and caused the restoration of the consulship and tribunate of the peoples—and, with it, the right of appeal. The *decemvirs* had become increasingly tyrannical, and refused to give up power even though their tenure was limited to two years. This corruption and despotism was eerily reminiscent of the rule of the kings, who had been overthrown sixty years earlier—due, in no small part, to Lucretia. Members of the second decemvirate either committed suicide or were exiled. John Webster and Thomas Heywood sum up the influence of Lucretia and Verginia very neatly:

Two ladies fair, but most unfortunate

*Have in their ruins rais'd declining Rome,
Lucretia and Virginia, both renowned
For chastity.*

Appius and Virginia

John Webster and Thomas Heywood

Appius Claudius, a *decemvir*, set his eye on Verginia. His attempts to bribe her and win her favour with promises fell flat—Verginia was from a humble, honorable, and principled family. Although she was already betrothed to Lucius Icilius, Claudius contrived a plan where Marcus Claudius—‘the *decemvir*’s pimp’—claimed that Verginia was his slave, and that she had been illegally adopted by Lucius Verginius. One day, Marcus Claudius attempted to abduct Verginia while she was on her way to school, but a shocked and outraged crowd gathered to help the girl. Claudius insisted that the matter be dealt with before a judge, namely Appius, in court; in the meantime, Verginia would be held with Claudius while her father rushed back to the hearing from active service.

An enraged Lucius Icilius arrived, threatening to die rather than to betray his fiancé; Appius relented, and allowed Verginia to go home. Despite attempts by Appius to have Verginius arrested before he could reach Rome, the distraught father arrived. The next morning he led his daughter into the forum—he was in mourning, she in rags, attended by *matronae*. Appius, to everyone’s astonishment, ruled in favour of Claudius. Livy tells us that the supportive women in the crowd were ‘more effective with their silent tears than words could be.’

Nevertheless, the incident ended tragically when Verginius exercised his right as *paterfamilias*; he grabbed a butcher’s knife and stabbed his daughter in the heart, to liberate her from the shame (*stuprum*) a marriage to Appius Claudius would inevitably have brought: ‘I set her free’ (*in libertatem vindico*). Verginius cursed Appius, and the women indignantly demanded to know if this was their reward for raising children and remaining chaste (*pudicitiae praemia*). According to Livy, ‘the grief of women’ (*muliebris dolor*) was much more powerful, their grief so much deeper, due to their lack of restraint. The eventual result was that the decemvirate was disbanded and the Republic was restored.

The story, as related by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, is significant on a number of levels.¹¹ Firstly, it reinforces the traditional Roman values of chastity and virtue we saw in Lucretia. The aptly-named Verginia, like her predecessor, became a symbol of Roman *pudicitia*—Livy himself remarks on the striking similarities between the two women’s circumstances. Secondly, the story demonstrates an early example of the special qualities and dynamics women exerted when they resorted to public demonstrations. The infrequency of such behaviour, along with their silent but plangent support,

their *dolor*, and their *pudicitia*, was influential (although ultimately unsuccessful). Thirdly, it serves as an example of a father exerting his power as a father (his *patria potestas*). As *paterfamilias*, under Roman law Verginius had an absolute obligation to preserve the integrity of his family, including the chastity of his daughters; when this was compromised, he had little option other than to kill his daughter to preserve her *pudicitia*. Ironically, this law was enshrined in the *Twelve Tables*—one of the authors of which was Appius Claudius. Fourthly, the political consequences of this episode were, as in the case of Lucretia, highly significant—the public demonstration that ensued led to the abolition of the highly unpopular and increasingly tyrannical decemvirs. Finally, Verginia was a symbol of liberty; if she had lived she would have forever been under the undesirable control of Appius Claudius, but her father's actions allowed her to escape that dreadful fate. She was liberated in death: *libertatem vindicare*.

These were two women who paid for their *pudicitia* with their lives, symbols of virtue who helped to change the course of Roman history. They were also women who, like Rome itself, had been vindicated and defended by men against the tyrannical abuse of power; 'The rape of women became the history of the state,' as Joshel puts it. Their stories echoed in Roman history through Tacitus.¹²

There was another Verginia, a determined and plucky woman who reinforced the importance of *pudicitia* in 296 BC. Fabius Rullianis had set up a shrine to Patrician Chastity (*Pudicitia Patricia*), exclusive to *univira* patrician women. However, when the patrician Verginia married the plebeian Lucius Volumnius Flamma, she found herself excluded. Not to be outdone, she set up a parallel shrine in her husband's house in the Vicus Longus, on the grounds that *pudicitia* was classless; in doing so, she provided one of the first examples of the fight for social justice in Rome.

Ironically, the following year saw plague, prodigies, and an outburst of *stuprum* amongst a number of patrician women who had allegedly resorted to prostitution. This was considered serious enough to warrant consultation of the Sibylline Books by Fabius Gurgus (one of the curile aediles), in order to learn the appropriate official reaction. The patrician prostitutes were fined, and the proceeds (indicative of the scale of the scandal) were used to build the temple of *Venus Obsequens* (The Temple of Obedient Venus). The reason for this mass conversion of *matrona* to *meretrix* (prostitute) was unclear, but it is possible it was an early bid for marriage reform that would increase freedom for women.

Cornelia Scipionis Africana (c. 180 BC—105 BC)

Cornelia Scipionis Africana is the epitome of the ideal Roman *matrona*. She was one of four children, the second daughter of the illustrious Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus and Aemilia Paulla, and the wife of Tiberius

Sempronius Gracchus, whom she married in around 175 BC. She was the mother of the brothers Gracchi, Tiberius, and Gaius, and of Sempronia. She came from a celebrated patrician family, the Corneli Scipiones, but she married into a celebrated plebeian family; they were rivals. Cornelia's immediate ancestry was crucial to her reception during her life and in the years afterwards; as the granddaughter of the renowned general Lucius Aemilius (who fell at the Battle of Cannae in 216 BC) and the daughter of Scipio Africanus (who extinguished the Carthaginian threat by defeating Hannibal), her credentials as a fine and noble Roman woman were impeccable. Indeed, this progeny was an integral part of Cornelia's reputation as an inestimable *matrona*.

We know little of Cornelia's early life other than some unfortunate gynaecology—Pliny the Elder records how she was born with labial adhesion, an inauspicious condition that seemingly presaged the deaths of her two revolutionary sons. Pliny notes that it was considered a bad omen for a girl to be born with teeth in place; a girl who was born like this, Valeria, was banished from Rome by the *haruspices*. He adds that it was also an unpropitious thing for an infant girl to be born with her genitals grown together, as Cornelia would prove (*quasdam concreto genitali gigni infausto omine Cornelia Gracchorum mater indico est*). In around AD 220, Solinus explains that Cornelia expiated the portent when both of her famous sons died. Some, no doubt, viewed her antenatal condition and the birth of her sons as contrary to divine will.

Livy tells the undoubtedly apocryphal story of Cornelia's engagement; in 187 BC, when dining with members of the Senate, Scipio was persuaded to marry his daughter off to Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus. When Scipio returned home, he had to face a naturally indignant wife (*muliebritur indignabunda*), who was upset she had not been consulted about the future of her daughter. It was the mother's right to be informed, even if the intended groom should turn out to be the famous Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus.¹³

Cornelia's mother was Aemilia Tertia or, more commonly, Aemilia Paulla (c.230-163 BC). She was the daughter of the general Lucius Aemilius Paullus, consul in 216 BC and a casualty of Cannae. She was also sister to another renowned Roman general, Lucius Aemilius Paulus Macedonicus (consul in 182 BC and 168 BC). By all accounts, she was a mild and gentle woman, and loyal to her husband. She enjoyed her wealth—Polybius wrote of her:

This lady, whose name was Aemilia, used to display great magnificence whenever she left her house to take part in the ceremonies that women attend, having participated in the fortune of Scipio when he was at the height of his prosperity. For apart from the richness of her own dress and the decorations of her carriage, all the baskets, cups, and other utensils for the sacrifice were either of gold or silver, and were borne in her train on all such solemn occasions ... while the number of maids and men-servants in attendance was

This description was probably derived from his first-hand observations as a guest in the house of Lucius Aemilius Paulus Macedonicus, and shows Aemilia to be unusually affluent for a Roman lady of the time, while she also enjoyed an unusual level of freedom within her marriage. It demonstrated how things were starting to change in Roman society; money was available to elite women, liberal husbands were permitting their wives to be independent, and these independent women were becoming more ostentatious, fashion-conscious, and self-important. However, Aemilia left her most enduring mark as a faithful and supportive wife, and as a model *matrona*—albeit a very rich one. She was fertile, with four surviving children, she was presumably *univira*, and she was loyal to her husband—even conniving at one of his infidelities, according to Valerius Maximus, in the old Roman way. Aemilia was undoubtedly a fine role model for Cornelia.

Cornelia's sons were murdered: Tiberius in 133 BC and Gaius in 121 BC, when Cornelia was around sixty years old. Her reaction to the twin bereavements is one of the reasons why she was elevated to iconic status, being described as the ideal *matrona* by Plutarch in his *Life of Gaius Gracchus*. She achieved fame and respect through the ages for maintaining her dignity when speaking of the exploits and tragic deaths of her two boys. Her company and conversation were much-enjoyed by scholars and monarchs in the salons she held in her villa at Minesum—an example of 'how far a noble nature, an honorable ancestry and a virtuous upbringing, can fortify [wo]men against grief'.¹⁵

However, there is earlier praise in Plutarch's *Life of Tiberius Gracchus* when he narrates the story of how Cornelia's husband, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, elected to die in place of her. This was a rare example of a husband's familial piety: it was more common for the wife to give her life for that of her husband. Two snakes had ominously appeared on the marital bed; alarmed and superstitious, Tiberius took them to a soothsayer (*haruspex*) to divine their purpose. After the *haruspex* had explained that the female snake represented Cornelia, and the male snake Tiberius, she claimed that Cornelia would die if the female snake was released before the male snake and he would die if the opposite occurred. Tiberius gallantly chose to release the male snake—the anonymous author of the *De Viris Illustribus* sees his unenviable decision as a demonstration of his love and respect for Cornelia (*amore Corneliae coniugis*). Plutarch concludes that Tiberius made the right decision because Cornelia was such a good mother and manager of their estates, and because she was so noble and impeccably behaved. Pliny concurs, but adds that Tiberius conceded that he was somewhat older than his wife, whereas she was still young and fertile. Tiberius died soon afterwards, in around 154 BC, leaving his still relatively-young widow to raise their twelve children—nine of whom died in infancy—and to run their estate. Cicero

corroborates the serpentine story in his *De Divinatione*, giving Gaius Gracchus as his source.¹⁶

A record of twelve children in twenty years is impressive, even by Roman standards of serial childbirth; it becomes even more impressive when her husband's long overseas postings are taken into account. The number may be exaggerated by stillbirths and miscarriages, but at the same time it is rendered credible by the births of twins or triplets who did not survive. In any event, her fertility—one of the badges of the good *matrona*—was never questioned too closely if her iconic status was to be maintained. Pliny the Elder, who brings us the statistic, seems equally amazed by the fact that she produced babies of alternating gender: boy, girl, boy, girl and so on, or possibly six of one followed by six of the other.¹⁷

In widowhood, Cornelia 'proved herself a woman of such discretion and noble ideals and so devoted a mother'.¹⁸ Despite a marriage proposal from the very (at least politically) eligible Ptolemy VIII, whose nickname 'Physkon' ('big belly') says it all about his physique, Cornelia remained a widow and a *univira*, retiring to Misenum in relative comfort. Her surviving daughter, Sempronia, married Scipio Africanus the Younger; her surviving sons, Gaius and Tiberius, were 'brought up with such care and such ambitious hopes that ... they were considered to owe their virtues even more to their education than to their lineage'.¹⁹ Cornelia oversaw that education. This concern with her children chimes with this report from Tacitus:

...in the good old days the children of any respectable mother were brought up not in the room of a hired nurse, but on their mother's knee. She was honoured to look after the home and do right by her children.

He goes on to quote the examples of Cornelia, Aurelia Cotta (Julius Caesar's mother), and Atia Balba Caesonia (the mother of Augustus), as three role models to emulate:

...the mothers of the Gracchi, of Caesar, of Augustus, Cornelia, Aurelia, Atia, all looked after their children's education, bringing up the greatest of sons. The strict discipline produced in each case a pure and good nature which vice could not corrupt.²⁰

Quintillian (c. AD 35–100) agreed that it was a mother's duty to ensure their children received the best-possible education, whatever her own achievements—he also cited Cornelia as a fine exemplar; he wanted women to be educated so that they could pass the benefits onto their sons.²¹

It seems that Cornelia's reputation was assured even during her lifetime. Plutarch gives us this wonderfully barbed retort by Gaius Gracchus, after his mother had been criticised by a political opponent:

'What,' he said, 'do you abuse Cornelia, who gave birth to Tiberius?' And

since the one who had uttered the abuse was charged with acting like a woman, ‘With what effrontery,’ said Gaius, ‘can you compare yourself with Cornelia? Have you had as many children as her? Indeed, all Rome knows that she refrained from commerce with men for longer than you, even though you are a man.’²²

Cornelia was obviously politically active, and represented political capital. Her direct influence on her son is evident from the pressure she put on Gaius to withdraw legislation that would have damaged Marcus Octavius, a man whose brother Tiberius had deposed from the tribunate. Both Cornelia and Gaius were bound to benefit politically from this generosity of spirit—and the spin of public relations, once word got out.

Home education amongst the middle and upper classes produced a number of exceptionally gifted and talented women, whether they were the teachers or the pupils; Cornelia was one of the most famous of these. She was an early beneficiary of the more enlightened, Greek-influenced education for women, which took them beyond household management and working the wool. She was erudite, and attracted cultured Greeks amongst the ‘learned men’ in her circle; Carneades of Cyrene found it quite normal to converse with her on philosophy. Cornelia also hired the celebrated tutors Blossius of Cumae and Diophanes of Mytilene to help out. Both were eminent Stoics—Blossius was a radical, and would have influenced Tiberius both philosophically and politically. Cornelia was bilingual (speaking both Greek and Latin), bookish, a good lyre player, a competent mathematician, and could obviously hold her own in a philosophical argument. Quintilian praised her literary style, and Cicero reveals that her letters were published and admired. She would certainly have benefitted from the Greek library that was brought home to Italy by her uncle, Aemilius Paullus. The coterie at Misenum would surely have included such literary and philosophical celebrities as Ennius, Terence, Lucilius Polybius, and Panaetius—all of whom were acquaintances of Scipio Africanus or Scipio Aemelianus at one time or another. Cornelia’s namesake Cornelia Metella (c. 73 BC–48 BC), daughter of Metellus Scipio and fifth wife of Pompey, was similarly gifted in playing the lyre, mathematics, and philosophy.

Evidence of Cornelia’s literacy may come in a letter she reputedly wrote to Gaius Gracchus in what has become known as the *Cornelia Fragments*. Cornelius Nepos (c. 110-124 BC) quotes the letter, which was written in around 122 BC. The solicitous mother, still no doubt grieving from the death of her elder son, Tiberius, rebukes Gaius for the dangerous and controversial step of seeking the tribunate; she implores him to postpone this action until after her death. Maternal concern apart, private and well-argued letters such as this would have been both persuasive and edifying for her sons. As we have noted, her letters were considered to be of a high literary standard, and revealed her educated style of speaking. Quintilian endorses this by writing:

We have heard how the mother Cornelia made a substantial contribution to the eloquence of the Gracchi, a woman whose erudite speech in her letters has also been handed down to future generations.

Cicero had earlier said:

We have all read the letters of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and are happy to believe that they were not so much brought up in their mother's lap as in the elegance and refinement of their language.

Moreover, the contents of this letter—if genuinely by Cornelia's hand—demonstrates a familiarity with the political and social issues of the day.²³

Her own high standard of education, and the encouragement and education she diligently passed on to her children, no doubt inspired and enthused her sons, helping to mould them into the populist revolutionaries and reformers they became. Her focus on rhetoric made them great public orators—Cicero admired the speeches of the Gracchis, and 200 years later Pliny confirms them as classics when he sees a manuscript in the house of a friend, Pomponius Secundus.²⁴

Cornelia's devotion to her children was characterised by her (possibly apocryphal) response to a showboating Campanian lady, who was parading her gems and jewels in front of Cornelia. She asked Cornelia to show her jewels, at which Cornelia simply pointed to her sons and said, 'These are my jewels!' (*'haec ornamenta sunt mea'*).²⁵

We have already seen how her dignified recollections of the lives and achievements of her sons preserved their memory; her solicitude towards Sempronia, her daughter, was in some ways just as crucial, because it seems she grew into a dutiful woman who took on the responsibility of maintaining her mother's proud reputation as an iconic Roman *matrona*—an exemplary daughter, wife, and mother.

No one escapes history completely unscathed though, no matter how resplendent their reputation. Appian implicates Cornelia and Sempronia in the murder of Sempronia's husband, Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemelianus, although he does suggest that his death may also have been a suicide:

One evening, after placing a tablet near his couch at home, on which he would write a speech overnight which he intended to deliver before the people, Scipio was found dead in his bed, without a wound. It is not known whether this was done by Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi—aided by her daughter Sempronia, who was in a loveless marriage because she was deformed and childless [possibly as the result of a fertility problem]—or whether it was because he may have abolished the law of Gracchus, or (as some think) he committed suicide because he plainly saw that he could not accomplish what he had promised. Some say that slaves testified, under torture, that unknown persons were introduced through the rear of the house that night, and that they

suffocated him—and that those who knew about it hesitated to tell, because the people were still angry with him and rejoiced at his death.

All other sources pin the blame on Sempronia alone. Appian's accusation may be accounted for by the traditional male predilection for branding all women who displayed any power or influence as murderesses, poisoners, and sorceresses. Martial, who was out to shock and reinforce the demand that he should be allowed to sodomise his wife, cites Cornelia as one of the noble women who submitted to sodomisation by their husbands. Sempronia showed strength of mind and supreme confidence when she refused to kiss the tribune Equitius in the Forum, an imposter who claimed to be the bastard son of her brother. This all-important kiss, had it occurred, would have indicated that Equitius was a member of the family.²⁶

A rare honour was bestowed on Cornelia soon after her death, when a bronze statue of her was erected in Rome—the first for a Roman woman—with the simple inscription: 'Cornelia, wife of Africanus, the mother of the Gracchi' ('*Cornelia, Africani f./Gracchorum*'). It was Cornelia's aim to be remembered as 'the mother of the Gracchi', not as granddaughter of Lucius Aemilius or as daughter of Scipio Africanus. Pliny the Elder tells us that the statue showed a seated Cornelia, and that it was originally in the colonnade of Metellus, though it was later moved to Octavia's buildings.²⁷

Cornelia would become the model of the perfect Roman *matrona*, a champion of the *familia*, the adhesive which held Roman society together. She was a caring mother, who ensured her children were educated; she supported them in life and death, being urbane and educated herself. She was also a *univira*, declining to remarry after her husband's death. Her role as a paradigm of matronly behaviour became increasingly significant as Roman society became more decadent, with rising levels of adultery, declining marriages, falling birthrates amongst native Italians, and divorce becoming more common. The attempts of Augustus to curb this moral decay in 18 BC, the *lex Julia maritandis ordinibus*, were enacted, no doubt, with Cornelia cited as the model that every Roman woman should emulate.

Aurelia Cotta (120 BC–54 BC)

Aurelia Cotta was from a family of consular rank, and was the mother of three children—Julia Caesaris Major, Julia Caesaris Minor, and Gaius Julius Caesar. She was the wife of Marcus Atius, and the grandmother of the Emperor Augustus. Tacitus regarded her as an ideal *matrona*, like Cornelia, largely because she looked after her son's education during her husband's extended absences away on active service. To Plutarch, she was strict and respectable.²⁸

She was obviously a particularly strong-willed, brave, and gifted woman. When the dictator Sulla demanded that her son divorce his wife, Cornelia

Cinna (97–69 BC), the eighteen-year-old Caesar refused; Aurelia defended her son, alongside her brother Gaius Aurelius Cotta, in the courts. When Cornelia Cinna died in childbirth, Aurelia took on the responsibility of raising her son's infant daughter, Julia.

Aurelia had the misfortune to be implicated, however innocently, in the Bona Dea scandal of December 62 BC. All men were debarred from these rites, and even male animals and pictures or statues of men had to be covered over. Only *matronae* and the Vestal Virgins were permitted to attend—according to Cicero, any man caught observing the rites could be punished by blinding.²⁹ The Vestals brought in Bona Dea's image to the venue and a meal of sow's entrails was eaten, sacrificed to the goddess on behalf of the Roman people. The fun lasted all night, with female musicians, games, and wine—euphemistically called 'milk', and drunk from a 'honey jar'. This was not a feeble attempt to conceal drinking, but rather a tradition which came about when Fannus, who was married to Bona Dea, caught her surreptitiously drinking and beat her to death with a myrtle branch. Myrtle was also associated with Aphrodite and sex—as such, it was foreign to the rites and banned. The *matronae* refrained from sex in the run-up to the festival to ensure their purity.

Bona Dea was jealously protected by its adherents; when the rites of 62 BC—which were being held at Caesar's house as he was that year's Pontifex Maximus—were infiltrated by a high-profile man, the ensuing scandal was huge. This was not least because of the celebrities involved: Aurelia Cotta, Pompeia Sulla (Caesar's wife at the time), Aurelia's daughter Julia, and the Vestals were all there. According to Juvenal, any sexual propriety that remained in Rome evaporated that night: Publius Clodius Pulcher, Juvenal's 'lute girl with a penis' (*'psaltria penem ... intulit'*), sacrilegiously gatecrashed the rites.³⁰ His apparent objective was to pursue his ongoing affair with Pompeia; the scandal led to Caesar divorcing her, even though she had been innocently implicated in the outrage—Caesar could not have his wife under suspicion. Aurelia Cotta testified at the trial.

Bravery and loyalty were characteristic of female paragons of virtue. There were, of course, many other brave and loyal women who went the extra mile for their husbands. Pliny the Younger describes a *matrona's* exceptional devotion to her husband in a letter to Maecilius Nepos. Arria, 'a shining example and comfort', did everything she possibly could to show her husband, Aulus Caecina Paetus, that his impending suicide (ordered by Claudius) would not hurt. She said, 'Paetus, it doesn't hurt,' (*'Paete, non dolet'*), after she had bravely shielded the news of their son's recent death from her husband—to spare him additional grief.

On the other hand, it was an even greater thing when, without the reward of immortality and without the reward of glory, she hid her tears and concealed her grief and continued to play the mother even though she had lost her son.³¹

Later in Pliny's letter we learn of Arria's brave determination to end her own life: 'It's no use,' she said, 'You can have me die a horrible death, but you can't stop me from dying'. As she said this she leapt from her chair, struck her head against the wall opposite, and slumped to the ground. When she came around she said, 'I told you that I would find a hard way to die if you denied me the easy way out.'

Martial also honours chaste (*casta*) Arria's bravery. Perceptively, he has her say that her wound does not hurt (*non dolet*), but that the wound that Paetus is about to inflict on himself will certainly hurt her.³² Such courage ran in the family; we will meet Arria's granddaughter, the courageous Fannia, in the chapter on Vestal Virgins.

Of course, Arria and Fannia were not alone. Pliny the Elder describes how a woman committed suicide with her husband by jumping into Lake Como, roped together, after she had diagnosed him with an incurable illness (a urogenital cancer, syphilis, or urogenital tuberculosis).³³ Tacitus also describes a number of female suicides; Paxaea takes her own life with her husband, governor of the Balkan province of Moesia, Pomponius Labeo, who was charged with maladministration in AD 34 by Tiberius. Lucius Antistius Vetus was proscribed by Nero for his part in the Pisonian conspiracy of AD 65; his mother-in-law Sextia, and her daughter Antistia Pollitta, both opened their veins with him, but not before Pollitta remonstrated with Nero: 'She wailed like a woman,' but she also 'screamed at him in a most unwomanly rage'.³⁴ Sextia also chose to die with her husband, Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus, when he was under prosecution—as did Paulina, the wife of Seneca, although her attempt was thwarted by Nero and she lived on, 'praiseworthy in the memory of her husband'.³⁵ Aemilia Lepida, wife of Drusus, took her own life in AD 36 to avoid prosecution on charges of adultery with a slave.

A wife's suicide can be viewed as an extension of the *univira* ideal; it was received thinking that not only should a woman marry only one man, but also that she should not outlive him. Arria rebukes Vibia, wife of Scribonianus, who lived on when her husband had been murdered in her very arms, and Arria urges her own daughter to commit suicide should her husband die before her. She also displayed other signs of bravery and single-minded loyalty—she risked her life when Paetus was dragged back to Rome after Scribonianus had been killed. He was about to board the boat when Arria begged the soldiers to take her too.

'Surely a consul should be allowed a few slaves to serve his meals, dress him, and put on his shoes,' she said, 'Only I excel at all these things'. She did not get her way, so she hired a small fishing vessel to follow the larger boat.³⁶

There were yet more loyal wives, whose selflessness may not have extended to suicide but was still remarkable. Sulpicia dressed up as a slave to follow her proscribed husband, Lentulus Cruscellio, into exile in Sicily.³⁷ The wife of Rubellius Plautus also went into exile with him, and two of the wives of the Piso conspirators joined their banished husbands. Quintilian tells us

about the defiant Cloatilla, who was pardoned by Claudius when she buried her husband even though it was illegal to bury anyone convicted of treason.^{[38](#)}

Clever Women: Sempronia, Hortensia, and Lesbia

By the first century BC, the enhanced freedom enjoyed by Roman women in the elite classes, and the flood of immigrants from the east—notably Greece—which accompanied Roman conquests and annexations in the Mediterranean world, was starting to have a liberalising effect on some areas of Roman society. Part of this was an enlightened attitude towards female education (which included the liberal arts), and an acceptance that at least some women could pursue a life outside of the home. Examples of these pursuits would be running shops or other businesses, working in the entertainment industry, or pursuing a career in midwifery or obstetrics and gynaecology.

Traditionally, ‘primary’ Roman education would be delivered by an elementary teacher (*litterator* or a *magister ludi litterarii*) to children from around the age of seven, and its aim was to perfect self-expression. Skill in public speaking was the be-all and end-all; it was essential for the middle class Roman child to know how to speak properly and to understand Virgil, Horace, and Livy, for example. Boys were the focus of this education—they were the ones who would take public office, and declaim in the courts and in the Senate. There was unavoidable and meticulous work on the alphabet—first with letters, and then with syllables, according to Quintilian and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.¹ The *grammaticus* took over from the age of eleven, and the equally painstaking and pedantic analysis of literary texts began; these were never studied as an end in themselves, but as preparation for the pupil’s role as an orator in the courts or in the Senate. Geography, mythology, and grammar were also on the curriculum. By the end of the Republic, the teaching of rhetoric (under the *rhetor*) was introduced, and moved the fifteen or sixteen-year-old male student yet closer to competence in declamation. There were schools—we have seen how Verginia was on her way to her school when she was kidnapped—but most education, particularly amongst the elite families, seems to have been home-based.

Where did this leave girls? Women were of course excluded from public life—the law, politics, and the military—and this obviated the need for them to be taught rhetoric and declamation. The education of girls and young women seems to have been limited to home-based teaching at the elementary stage, under the *materfamilias* or a *litterator*. Marriage was also a limiting factor; when a girl married at twelve or thirteen, there was little time for education for the fledgling *matrona*. Her duty would now be to educate the children she was expected to produce. Elite and well-off women were

respected for giving their children a good start in life; for boys, they provided an impetus along the *cursus honorum*, and for both girls and boys they passed down the all-important cultural heritage and history of the family, of Rome, and of *Romanitas*.

We have seen how Tacitus and Quintilian agreed that it was the duty of a *matrona* to ensure their children received the best-possible education.² Cicero cites the eloquence of Laelia, the daughter of Gaius Laelius, and the speech that Hortensia made to the triumvirs in 42 BC.³ This speech has been remembered because it is well-respected—not just because it was (unusually) written and delivered by a woman. Cicero wrote that Laelia came from a family of accomplished speakers; as well as her father, her two daughters—the Muciae—and her granddaughters—the Liciniae—were also eloquent orators.⁴ Traditional Romans, like Quintilian, would have endorsed the education of women to some degree, on the grounds that an educated *matrona* was able to provide the next generation of boys and girls with an early education.

Although the *matrona* was expected to enhance and be involved in the learning of her own children, beyond that she was not necessarily required to exhibit any of her own education. As we have seen, Cornelia was something of an exception—she was literate, numerate, and sophisticated, earning unqualified praise for the discreet and dignified manner in which she conducted herself in widowhood and after the deaths of her two sons. She undoubtedly benefitted from a more enlightened, Greek-style education for women, which went far beyond looking after the house, indulging the husband, and spinning the wool.

Sempronia (fl. 77 BC)

Sempronia, the Catilinarian conspirator, was the wife of Decimus Junius Brutus (consul in 77 BC), and sister-in-law of the eminent orator Hortensius. She too showed conspicuous talent, but, given her political circumstances, hers attracted condemnation and vilification. Sempronia qualifies just as well as a woman of politics and power, because she was politically active as well as clever and educated. Sallust writes that her courage was worthy of a man (*virilis audaciae*), that she married well, and had produced children; she was versed in Latin and Greek, accomplished in the lyre, and a good dancer, and she could compose verse, tell jokes, and be reserved, calming, or scatological in conversation. In short, she was a woman of charm and elegance (*multae facetae, multusque lepos inerat*), and a veritable *docta puella*, (an educated woman). So far, very much in the tradition of Cornelia.

However, Sallust had another angle—he adds that, marriage and motherhood apart, she overturned the qualities expected of the conventional *matrona*. She was impulsive, louche, passionate, and a dirty dancer (*elegantius quam necesse est probae*), and she was a perjurer, an accessory to

murder, a liar, and a spendthrift. Chastity and sexual propriety (*decus atque pudicitia*) were way down on her list of priorities, and she was on fire with lust (*libido sic accensa*), going looking for men rather than being sought by them. To Sallust, Sempronia was an anti-*matrona*; while he grudgingly concedes that she was undoubtedly brave and gifted, she stepped far beyond the traditional values laid down for Roman women. Her support for Catiline and the attendant stigma, her independence of mind and her ostentatious social skills, and her reputed whoring would have caused outrage and anger amongst many more men than just Sallust.⁵

Sempronia exhibits the new independence that women of the elite classes were beginning to discover in the early first century. While Roman women were never emancipated, it was now clearly possible for them to exert themselves politically and make themselves useful to one faction or another. A wide-ranging education in the arts was there for the taking, alongside a mixed social life and an independent professional life. Through these means, a woman was now able to display her sophistication and expertise with like-minded men and women. Cornelius Nepos tells us that it was quite normal for women to attend dinner parties with their husbands, and we know that it was routine for them to go to the theatre, to games, and to celebrate festivals and go shopping. At the same time, however, Sempronia triggers a typically conservative male reaction to the independently-thinking, flamboyant, and immodest Roman female; insecurity, contempt, and even fear. The received wisdom amongst men was that any vivacious, outgoing, and social woman must be decadent, sexually suspect, and—in Sempronia’s case—a criminal. It is intriguing that nowhere in the *Catilina* does Sallust describe or detail Sempronia’s actual involvement in the conspiracy; she is guilty by innuendo.

Sallust may well have had an axe to grind; after all, the Catiline conspiracy of 63 BC threatened the stability of the Roman state. To Sallust, it was ‘a crime that was unprecedented in memory and which [he considers] to have brought unique dangers to Rome’ (*facinus in primis ego memorabile existimo sceleris atque periculi novitiate*). Sallust himself had been expelled from the Senate on suspicion of immorality. His righteous indignation is evident when he moralises in the *praefatio* of the *Catilina*—the hankering after the ‘good old days’—and in the opening chapters, where he describes the conspirators as morally bankrupt, corrupt beyond comparison, and as inhabiting a cesspit of squalid depravity.⁶

He prefixes his attack on Sempronia with the revelation that the conspirators cynically enlisted the support of former prostitutes. These women had grown old and were by now somewhat less-desirable, although still wedded to profligacy; Catiline had presumably agreed to finance their debts in return for acts of terrorism, recruiting their slaves, and bringing their husbands on board—or else killing them. While never suggesting that Sempronia was one of these women, the close association implicates her in the squalor and tars her with the same brush as all the other conspirators. Whatever the case

may be, Sempronia was to some extent involved in one of the most dangerous attempted coups of the late Republic. Interestingly, however, she was never prosecuted for her complicity, because women could not be convicted of treason (*maiestas*); women were excluded from political power, and, therefore, also from laws relating to the abuse of that power. Catiline's wife, Aurelia Orestilla, escaped prosecution for the same reason.

Hortensia (fl. 42 BC)

Hortensia is perhaps the most famous female orator in the classical world. She was the daughter of Quintus Hortensius Hortalus (114–150 BC), himself a celebrated speaker, friend, rival, and sometime colleague of Cicero. Cicero named a lost work on philosophy after him, the *Hortensius*. Hortensius also wrote books on the art of oratory, composed erotic poetry (according to Ovid), and wrote an accomplished *Annales*. He was a *bon viveur*, a lover and buyer of fine wines, and spent his wealth on art, villas, parks, fish-ponds, and sumptuous banquets. It was Hortensius who first added the peacock to Roman dinner party menus.

After growing up in such an environment, it is not altogether surprising that his daughter became something of an academic. Hortensia was unusual because she spent her adolescent education studying rhetoric and the speeches of Cicero, of the Greek orators, and of her father. Her time was not wasted. In 42 BC the three members of the Second Triumvirate—Lepidus, Octavian, and Mark Antony—were casting around for funds to finance their wars against the assassins of Julius Caesar, as the money procured from their campaign of proscriptions was running out. An easy, apparently vulnerable target was women's wealth; accordingly, the triumvirs levied a supertax on the 1,400 most affluent women in Rome. The triumvirs had seriously miscalculated, however; the women were incensed, and, in a rare example of public demonstration by *matronae*, they marched on the Forum to vent their anger.

Here, Hortensia delivered a passionate and eloquent speech at a *contio*, before the triumvirs. Hortensia demanded to know why women, who had no say in, benefit, or glory from the wars, should be required to finance them. Attempts to disperse the women failed; Hortensia's passion won the day, and the taxable quota was radically reduced to 400 women. Men with over 100,000 sesterces were obliged to make good the shortfall by lending money to the triumvirate themselves; immigrants (*peregrini*) were similarly taxed. Appian writes that the speech was so good you would never know that it had been written and delivered by a woman.⁷ Valerius Maximus says that Hortensia's father henceforth 'lived and breathed through the words of his daughter'.⁸

Hortensia was not the first intelligent woman to use her education for political or legal ends. Men were not the only lawyers; the woman skilled in the law, the *iurisperita*, was alive and well from at least the second century

BC. The most famous case is provided by the comic playwright Titinius, pioneer of plays performed in Roman dress (*fabulae togatae*) in his *Iursiprita*. Titinius was a contemporary of Plautus and Terence, whose work survives only in fragments; however, we can glean that the hero of the *Iurispirita* was a legally trained woman. Titinius pokes fun at the heroine here, interfering as she is in a man's world, and in his *Barbatus* he attacks women's luxury and the repeal of the *Lex Oppia*. In the *Hortensius*, he has women outrageously demand membership of the Senate. Titinius anticipates Juvenal, whose withering attack on clever women includes *causadici*, suggesting that women lawyers had been active for at least 250 years.⁹

The 151 BC case of Manilia may be our first real-world example of a female lawyer. Manilia appealed to the tribunes after Hostilius Mancinus launched an action after turning up on her doorstep, drunk, and demanding entry and no doubt more besides that (an *exclusus amator*); she pelted him with stones. It is possible that the tribunes rejected Hostilius's case on the grounds of his unreasonable behaviour, as argued by Manilia.

Claudia, the Vestal Virgin, was sure of her legal standing in 143 BC when she endorsed her father's spurious and unofficial triumph—but it is impossible to know whether or not she was actually legally trained. We are already familiar with the eloquence of Laelia, the daughter of the famous orator Gaius Laelius, and mother and grandmother to girls who were all eloquent orators, able to boast knowledge of Roman law.

Valerius Maximus tells us how Fannia conducted her own defence when Caius Titinius, her unscrupulous husband, made a claim to retain her dowry when he divorced her on the grounds of her alleged *stuprum*.¹⁰ The judge, Caius Marius, knew that Titinius had foreknowledge of Fannia's questionable morals and had only married her in order to illicitly procure the dowry. Fannia received a nominal fine of one sesterce, while Titinius had to swallow a fine equal in value to the dowry. Fannia was able to return the favour to Marius when she later concealed him during his flight from Sulla.

Valerius Maximus has more examples of female lawyers: firstly, there is Maesia of Sentium, who conducted her own defence and, through her forensic expertise, secured her own acquittal in 77 BC—Maesia became known as Androgyne because she had excelled in the work of a man, rather than that of a woman. Then there is Afrania, the wife of Licinius Bucco, whose enthusiasm for the law and constant recourse to litigation actually brought about a change in the law. Male lawyers had had enough. They were so irritated and distracted by Afrania and her overzealous passion for legal matters that they enacted legislation prohibiting women from pleading in courts of law (*pro allis postulare*). It was, after all, man's work, and it was somewhat immodest of women to practise at the bar—a *prima facie* case of deficient *pudicitia*, no less.¹¹ Afrania was just the sort of woman Juvenal would have had in mind, modelled as she possibly was on the stone-throwing, legally-trained, *paraklausithyron*-defying prostitute of the mid-second century

Lesbia, Claudia Metelli, or Clodia (c. 95–44 BC)

As we have seen, in the late Republic better-off women enjoyed more and more independence, allowing them more freedom outside the confines of the home. This coincided with the emergence of a coterie of male poets, who were able to eschew the traditional *mos maiorum*, rejecting the *cursus honorum* for a life of *otium* in which they could spend their time penning poetry and pursuing the objects of their devotion. Among these we can recognise such poets as Licinius Calvus, Varro of Atax, Valerius Cato, Furius Bibaculus, Helvius Cinna, Cornificius, Tigidas, and, most famously, Catullus. Collectively, they went under the name of *poetae novi*, *neoterói*, or *Cantores Euphorionis*.¹³ Traditionalists regarded them with suspicion, and saw their otiose lifestyles as frivolous and decidedly un-Roman.

As a champion of the *mos maiorum*, and contemptuous of anything Greek, Cato the Elder (234–149 BC) had spoken angrily against what he saw as a time of moral decline, and an erosion of the robust principles on which Rome was built.¹⁴ The growing independence of the women of Rome was an ominous factor in all of this.¹⁵ The defeat of Hannibal at Zama in 202 BC, the victory over the Macedonians at Pydna in 168 BC, and the final extinguishing of the Carthaginian threat in 146 BC all allowed Rome to relax more, leading to an unprecedented influx of Greek and eastern influences and luxuries into an increasingly receptive Rome.¹⁶ The arrival of large numbers of slaves from conquered or annexed territories meant that women had more time on their hands, as they delegated duties to these figures in the more well-off households.

Traditional, restrictive marriage *cum manu* (the legal power of a husband over his wife) had virtually died out, leaving women to marry in a much freer arrangement, where love and affection were sometimes nothing more than a fortunate by-product.¹⁷ Divorcing was more or less a formality, and adultery was on the increase. Widowhood, free marriage, and divorce often left women financially better-off, or at least more independent.¹⁸ One view of the social climate is captured by Horace, writing about Rome in around 28 BC.¹⁹ He describes how the traditional Roman *familia* and *matrona* were now corrupted; he, not without some hypocrisy, tells how ‘generations rich in sin first sullied marriage, families and the home’, and then focusses on the mutton masquerading as lamb (*‘matura virgo’*) who is impatient to perfect her Greek dancing and other blandishments. She fantasises about ‘illicit love’ (*‘incesti amores’*), casually and indiscriminately seeking out young adulterers at drinking parties. The lights are left on, so that her husband—who is taking money for her services—can watch it all, whether she’s cavorting with a Spanish sailor or a door-to-door salesman. He is ‘the buyer of her pricey shame’ (*‘dedecorum pretiosus emptor’*).²⁰

The poetry of Catullus is redolent with allusions to the urbane society in which he moves, the sophisticated company—male and female—which he elects to keep, and the elegant, polished verses that he and his friends are expected to pen. His work is peppered with adjectives such as *suavis*, *elegans*, *urbanus*, *salsus*, *venustus*, and *lepidus*—‘in’ words, all indicative of the exclusive and smart society in which he lived. Everything and everyone worth knowing is agreeable, elegant, urbane, witty, charming, and smart—in a word, ‘cool’.²¹

This is the *milieu* in which Catullus and his contemporaries flourished, and these are the *mores* which they espoused. Their educated women could mix with whomsoever they chose at the games, at festivals, dinner parties, or in the theatre. They enjoyed, if they wanted to, a degree of sexual freedom not dissimilar to that enjoyed by a prostitute (*meretrix*), but with little of the usual social stigma.²²

Catullus’ Lesbia, Claudia Metelli, or Clodia, the wife of Q. Caecilius Metellus Celer—and brother to the notorious Publius Clodius Pulcher—typifies the unattached or readily detachable, sophisticated, rich, intelligent, and urbane ladies of the day. They could exert considerable influence—sexual, psychological, and sometimes political—on their male friends. The decline of the *mos maiorum* allowed these women to influence their men, and provided the *milieux* for the *poetae novi* in which they could write about their loves and relationships with conviction and honesty.²³ Independent men of means were, for the first time, able to shrug off their traditional allegiance to the bar and the battlefield, and to write personally and subjectively about independent women of means.²⁴

However, amongst the many women he writes about, Catullus reserves the highest praise for Lesbia. She has the grace (*venustas*) and elegance (*salis*) other women (such as Quintia and Ameana) lack, and she has charm (*veneres*). This, in addition to her physical attractiveness, adds up to total beauty. Lesbia has literary skills—she can identify the ‘best bits of the worst poet’, as she demonstrates when she hands back the awful annals of Volusius as ‘pure unsophisticated doggerel, complete crap’ (*pleni ruris et infacietiarum annales Volusi, cacata charta*).²⁵

She excites an extensive range of emotions in Catullus. For example, love:

No woman can truly say that she is loved nearly so much as my Lesbia is loved by me.

nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam vere, quatum a me Lesbia amata mea est

He also shows affection, as shown in the sparrow poems, and passion:

You ask, Lesbia, how many kisses are more than enough for me.

quaeris, quot mihi basiationes tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque

He shows (unconvincing) resignation at losing her:

But you, Catullus, stay strong.
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura

Before vilification:

Goodbye—live with your adulterers, hold them in your embrace, three hundred at a time.

cum suis vivat valeatque moechis, quos simul complexa tenet trecentos

And admiration:

Compare Lesbia with you? O stupid, crass times.
tecum Lesbia nostra comparator? o saeculum insapiens at infacetum

And tortured infatuation, with blind love:

He who sees you and hears you laughing gently, ripping out all my senses in my misery.

te spectat et audit dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis sensus mihi

How did I get into this state Lesbia?.... I'll never stop loving you, whatever you get up to.

*huc est mens deducta tua mea, Lesbia...nec desistere amare, omnia si facias*²⁶

So, we go from unqualified love and gentle affection, through unrequited love, to obscene vituperation, where we find a truculent Catullus bitterly describing Lesbia masturbating the grandees of Rome in the city's backstreets ('*nunc in quadriuiis et angiportis glubit magnamini Remi nepotes*'). Lesbia has the power to elevate Catullus to the ecstasies of love and adoration, and then reduce him to a quivering, hateful, wreck of a man.²⁷ There is nothing particularly unusual about that, but what is significant is that Catullus felt empowered by her, and empowered enough by the changing times to record and publish this rollercoaster of emotion. In doing so, he (and she through him) paved the way for the equally personal work of the elegiac poets and their sophisticated ladies (the *doctae puellae*). This opened the door for Gallus and Lycoris, Propertius and Cynthia, Tibullus and Delia, Sulpicia and Cerinthus, and for the love poetry of Horace and Ovid. The cultural climate also permitted the emergence of the first female Roman poet known to us.

Sulpicia was also a *docta puella*. The six elegies in which she describes her love for Cerinthus, as part of the *Corpus Tibullianum*, constitute some of the very few surviving examples of poetry composed by a Roman woman.²⁸ She came from a talented family—her father, Servius Sulpicius Rufus, was a famous lawyer who dabbled in love poetry himself, and her uncle, M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, was a literary patron and a composer of erotic

and bucolic verse. It seems probable that Sulpicia was in Messalla's sophisticated circle, thus confirming that women were not excluded from the literary coteries of the day. Just as her male contemporaries, Tibullus and Propertius, lived a somewhat dissolute life free from the shackles of the *mos maiorum* and the *cursus honorum*, so too did the coquettish Sulpicia. She was liberated from the modesty and chastity expected of the *matrona*, and loved 'messaging around' (*'pecasse iuvat'*).²⁹

There was another literary Sulpicia: Sulpicia Caleni, a poet who lived during the reign of Domitian. Her poems, only two of which survive, won praise from Martial, and are based on her own experience of married life—particularly her sex life with Calenus. Martial declares that her poems are required reading for wives and husbands alike, and are the key to a happy one-man, one-woman marriage.³⁰

Sulpicia, a *univira*, teaches pure and honest love, 'messaging about, teasing, and joking'. Sappho, no less, would have benefitted from her teachings. In the fourth century AD her reputation was sufficiently alive for Ausonius to describe her work as salacious, and her manner prim; the less liberal, unimpressed Sidonius Apollinaris, in the fifth century, includes her in a list of earlier poets whom he would not be imitating.

Lesbia was the first *docta puella* known to us in Latin poetry—undoubtedly a clever, well-educated, and passionate woman, circulating in an exclusive world populated with like-minded people. Yet she was much more than that. Like Catiline's Sempronia, she was something of a political operator, a powerful woman wielding political power in a man's world.

Clodia had much to live down; she allegedly murdered her husband in 59 BC, and was the incestuous bed-mate of her brother, Publius Clodius Pulcher. She was also a lover of Marcus Caelius Rufus, the friend whom Cicero defended against charges brought by Clodia. In doing so, Cicero destroyed her reputation in the *Pro Caelio* of 56 BC; he called her the 'Medea of the Palatine'—a witch, no less. Quintilian later adds an equally vivid and withering insult when he tells us that Caelius called her 'the Clytemnestra who sold herself for the price of a bath' (*quadrantaria Clytemnestra*), insinuating prostitution and the murder of her husband.³¹ Other charges laid against her included trying to seduce Cicero and having incestuous relations with her brother. Cicero's opening salvo at the trial, where he imputed that Clodia was a whore (*opibus meretriciis*), was not just a slur—it carried legal weight, as the evidence of a prostitute was considered unreliable in cases under the *Lex Plautia de Vi*. Clodia disappears from history after the trial.

Cicero's savage forensic attack was intended to rubbish the charges she had brought against Marcus Caelius Rufus; these included conspiracy to poison her and borrow gold from her under false pretences. The gold was alleged to have been used to pay slaves (owned by Lucus Luceius) to murder Dio of Alexandria, an envoy who was staying with Luceius. Cicero opened with a sly reference to her nobility, then to her decadence, and a side-swipe at

her incestuous acts with her brother. He argued that her separation from the noble Quintus Metellus and her affair with Caelius were driven by unrestrained lust. By way of contrast, Cicero invoked her illustrious and virtuous ancestors: Appius Claudius Caecus (builder of the first Roman aqueduct and the Appian Way), Claudia Quinta (saviour of the statue of Cybele), and Claudia (a Vestal Virgin). Cicero then delivers a litany of Clodia's dissolute activities in Rome and at Baiae, including her many parties. He sets her up as an *accusatrix*—this was alien to Romans, as women had no right to act as prosecutors in criminal courts. Cicero's allusions to the unruly house she kept (at odds with the traditional *domus*, dominated by the *paterfamilias*), all served to reduce her to a lubricious lying whore in the eyes of the jury.³² Interestingly, he included Clodia's literary skills—so admired by the libertine Catullus—in his fusillade, arguing that her evidence was unreliable because she was a poetess and a tale-teller.³³

It is hard to say whether Cicero's allegations had much substance. He was a neighbour of Clodia's in the Clivus Victoriae—a desirable part of Rome—and may well have witnessed first-hand the salons she no doubt held with visitors coming and going. His defence of Rufus undoubtedly had added edge, by virtue of the fact that the defendant was his friend—and that Cicero was still bitter about Clodia's involvement in the looting of his house while he was in exile. What we can say, with some certainty, is that Clodia embodied the new world of the independent woman in Cicero's eyes. She was everything the traditional *matrona* was not, and the opportunity to excoriate her in public, in court, would have proved difficult to resist or temper, whatever the facts were and despite Cicero's claims to objectivity.³⁴

Vestal Virgins, and Some Who Weren't

As symbols of the classical world go, the Vestal Virgins must be one of the most enduring and revered. They were one of the keystones of the official Roman state religion, they were central to all things relating to the *familia* and the household, and they were crucial to the wellbeing and preservation of Rome itself. For Horace, they represented the enduring sanctity of Rome: 'So long as the Chief Priest scales the Capitol with the silent virgin' (*'dum Capitolium scandet cum tacita virgine Pontifex'*).¹ For Virgil, Vesta was one of the ancient city's founding lawgivers in the *Aeneid*, along with Remus, *Fides*, and Quirinus (Romulus), eventually establishing the *pax Augusta* of his day.² The hearth (*focus*) was literally at the heart of the Roman household, traditionally tended by the daughters of a family—it was too important to be entrusted to slaves. The daughter of Chronos and Rhea, Vesta, was the goddess of the hearth, attended by the Vestal Virgins, who kept the sacred flame (*ignis inextinctus*) alight in the Temple of Vesta (*custos flammae*). This flame symbolised the beating heart of the Roman state.

The Vestal Virgins were inextricably linked with the ancient and revered foundation of Rome; the chief Vestal (*Virgo Vestalis Maxima*), perhaps paradoxically, symbolised the wife of the old Roman kings (represented in turn by the *Pontifex Maximus*). The others, known as the College, were the symbolic daughters of the king. The ancient kings were said to originate from sparks in the ground—hence Vesta, goddess of the flame and the hearth. This is consonant with the ancient belief that various founders of Latin cities were born of virgins who were impregnated by a spark, or by a phallus which emerged from the hearth. Examples of this are Tarchetius, King of the Albans, and Caeculus of Praeneste. The essential asexuality of fire accounts for Vesta's traditional virginity, according to Lactantius, Plutarch, and Ovid, and for the requirement that the flames are guarded by virgins.³

The sacred Palladium was kept in the Temple of Vesta. The Palladium dates all the way back to the Trojan War, and is closely associated with the founding of Troy and Rome. It was a wooden effigy of Pallas (the Roman Minerva), and fell from heaven to Ilus, the founder of Troy. During the Trojan War, the Greeks managed to extract vital information from the Trojan prophet, Helenius, to the effect that Troy would not fall while the Palladium remained there. Odysseus and Diomedes entered Troy by a secret passage, stole the Palladium, and paved the way for the Trojan horse and the fall of the city to the Greeks. The Palladium eventually found its way to Rome with Aeneas, to be installed in the temple of Vesta. It came to be regarded as one of

the sacred symbols (*pignora imperii*) or Roman power and rule (*imperium*).

One interfered with the Palladium at one's peril. Pliny the Elder told how Lucius Caecilius Metellus, celebrated victor at the battle of Panormus in the First Punic War, was blinded by fire when—full of good intentions—he rescued the Palladium from a fire which raged in the Temple of Vesta in 241 BC. Ovid and Valerius Maximus also mention this. In recognition of his *pietas* and bravery, the Senate allowed him the privilege of travelling to the Curia by chariot. The Palladium was also included in the sacred Roman relics removed by Elagabalus, who reigned AD 218–222.

Other sacred items housed in the temple included the *fascinum*, the erect phallus which ensured good fortune. The Temple of Vesta in the Forum was in the highly distinctive rotunda shape of an ancient house, the primitive wattle hut of the shepherd symbolising the earth. Pliny the Elder tells us that the circular roof was made from Syracusan bronze. The temple was never consecrated to prevent the Senate from sitting there; the Senate could only meet on consecrated ground. In 12 BC Augustus dedicated another temple to Vesta on the Palatine, thus forging strong links between himself and the goddess. After all, had not his ancestor, Aeneas, brought the fire of Troy to Italy; was not Romulus, who transferred the vestal cult from Alba Longa to Rome, born of a union between a Vestal Virgin and Mars?⁴ Ovid and Cicero disagree as to whether there was a statue of Vesta in the temple—Ovid says there was not, but Cicero claims there was and it was splashed by the blood of the assassinated *Pontifex Maximus* Quintus Mucius Scaevola. Plutarch suggests that the Samothracian gods were deposited there, brought to Troy by Dardanus when he built the city and then carried to Italy by Aeneas.⁵

As a measure of the awe in which the flame was held by the Romans, we know from Plutarch that it was a priority to salvage it when Rome was attacked by the Gauls in 390 BC. The Vestals made their escape on foot, carrying what sacred objects they could. The plebeian Lucius Albinus was fleeing the city in his wagon, piled high with his family and everything he owned; on seeing the plight of the Vestals, he offloaded his family and possessions, and took the Vestals and their *sacra* on board.

Tending the flame was paramount, and occupied each of the Vestals for around eight hours every day, either on a day or night shift. Any Vestal careless enough to allow the flame to go out was whipped by the *Pontifex Maximus* in a darkened room; she would be naked, and he would be behind a screen. Vigilance, then, was the watchword for the Vestal Virgin. When the flame did go out, it was rekindled by the friction of kindling from a lucky tree (*arbor felix*). According to Plutarch, however, it was re-ignited by pure flame from the sun.⁶

The Vestals were obviously exempt from the Roman woman's obligation to marry and bear children; they took a thirty-year vow of chastity, and devoted themselves to the safety of Rome. Rome was safe while their virginity remained intact; when it was violated, Rome was in danger. It was as

simple as that. Cicero believed that the sacred flames were required for the preservation and continuity of the Roman state. The flames symbolised the life force of the community, and they allowed men and women to commune with the gods. Vesta particularly resonated with women, as the hearth was where wives and daughters cooked food for the family and where the meal was eaten; offerings were thrown into the fire to divine the future, and the telling of the future was based on how they burned.

The Vestals and Vesta were also associated with agriculture, harvests, and fertility; Vesta was Mother (*Mater*). This inextricable link with the earth and with fecundity goes some way to explaining the paradoxical involvement of the Vestals in such fertility festivals as the Lupercalia and the Parilia. In Ovid's *Fasti* (6, 267 ff) and the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2, 65), both associate Vesta with the Earth, and the Vestals are similarly associated. Vesta is the very Earth itself—the sacred sphere (*orbs*) that gives life:

Vesta is the Earth itself, both have the perennial fire, the Earth and the sacred Fire. And they regard the fire as consecrated to Vesta because that goddess, being the Earth and occupying the central position in the universe, kindles the celestial fires from herself.⁷

This explains why Vestals guilty of unchasteness (*incestum*) were condemned to underground entombment in the Field of Flagitation (*Campus Sceleratus*); Vestals originated in the earth, and entombment was, in effect, a repatriation.

According to Pliny the Elder, when a Vestal fell ill, she was treated by a *matrona* away from the temple and its precincts, in a household approved by the College of Pontiffs.⁸ This early form of private medicine was extended by Valentinian in the fourth century AD to include a dedicated physician for ill Vestals. One famous example from the first century AD is Junia, the Vestal tended by Fannia—Arria's granddaughter and wife to Helvidius Priscus, an agitator against Vespasian, who had him executed in AD 75. Pliny praises the virtues of Fannia, doubting very much whether the world would be fortunate enough to see the likes of her again. She was the perfect *matrona*, the model of a wife, with the rare qualities of charm and amiability—and clever enough to value her husband's library, which she spirited away into safekeeping while he was in exile, despite orders to burn his books. Fannia displayed 'bravery, purity of mind, purity of body, dignity, and self-control' ('*fortitudo*', '*sanctitas*', and '*castitas*', '*gravitas*', and '*constantia*'). She twice followed her husband into exile, and was herself later exiled for her troubles. Tacitus sees her as an epitome of female *virtus*. Fannia later died from tuberculosis, contracted from the consumptive Vestal Virgin whom she had charitably nursed.⁹

Tradition has it that Rhea Silvia (or Ilia) was the mother of Romulus and Remus, the twins who founded Rome. Mars was the father, and she—paradoxically—was a Vestal Virgin. She was the daughter of Numitor, the

King of Alba Longa, and a descendant of Aeneas; how she could be a Vestal *and* a mother is explained by a *coup d'état*. Numitor's younger brother, Amulius, seized the crown and killed Numitor's son and heir; he then made Rhea Silva a Vestal Virgin, thus ending Numitor's chance of having another heir—as Rhea was pledged to thirty years of celibacy, or, in Livy's words, 'everlasting virginity' (*perpetua virginitas*). However, this was not to be; Mars seduced her, and Rhea gave birth to Romulus and Remus. Livy toys with the idea the Mars was introduced into the story because divine *incestus* was less damnable than sex with a mere mortal.¹⁰

Amulius then flung Rhea Silvia into prison, in chains, and orders were sent to drown the twins in the Tiber. The slave to whom this task had been delegated showed clemency, and instead put them into a small boat on the river. The river was in flood, and the vessel soon snagged on the bank. A she-wolf (*lupa*), recently bereft of her own cubs, discovered the pair; she suckled them, thus creating a story and an image which has become an eternal and iconic symbol of Rome. The boys were eventually found by Faustulus, a shepherd, and were brought up by his wife Larentia. Again, Livy speculates that it was Larentia who actually did the wet-nursing, and (due to her dubious reputation) was known as a *lupa*—one of the many Latin words for prostitute.¹¹

Of course, Romulus and Remus went on to establish Rome, topple Amulius, and restore Numitor to the throne; the Vestal Virgins were thus forever associated with the foundation of the city in 753 BC.¹²

However, it was Numa Pompilius (r. 717–673 BC), the King of Rome after Romulus, who was primarily responsible for instigating the college of Vestal Virgins in Alba Longa. His foundation included remuneration (paid for out of public funds) to help them in their temple duties and their devotion to virginity.¹³ Aulus Gellius records that Numa led the first initiate from her family; Plutarch says Numa also built the Temple of Vesta—in the heart of Rome—in 710 BC, and appointed its first two priestesses.¹⁴ Numa also appointed the *Pontifex Maximus*. Servius Tullius, the sixth King of Rome (r. 578–535 BC), doubled the number of priestesses. According to Varro, the first Vestals (after Rhea) were Gegaina, Veneneia, Canuleia, and Tarpeia.¹⁵ The number of Vestals was later increased to six, and remained at that number until the college was disbanded in AD 394—some 1,100 years later.

According to Livy, the Sabines declared war on Rome after their women had been seized and abducted by the Romans.¹⁶ They were aided in their assault on Rome by Tarpeia, who opened the city gates to the attacking forces; she had gone outside to fetch water for a sacrifice. Tarpeia was the daughter of Spurius Tarpeius, the commander of the Roman citadel. Why she betrayed Rome is disputed; some say that she was bribed by Tatius, the Sabine king, with the promise of receiving what the Sabine soldiers wore on their shield (left) arms as reward. Tarpeia only had eyes for their gold bracelets (*armillae*) and bejewelled rings; however, the Sabines saw it from another angle, and

crushed her to death with their shields. Others give an aetiological explanation, and maintain that the Sabines killed Tarpeia by pushing her off a 25-metre-high cliff on the Capitol which later took her name (*Rupes Tarpeia*, or *Saxum Tarpeium*). This place became notorious as a place of terrible executions for murderers, traitors, and the mentally and physically disabled. The Latin proverb '*arx Tarpeia Capitoli proxima*' ('The Tarpeian Rock is close to the Capitol') means that one's fall from grace can happen very quickly.

Crushing by shields is, of course, analogous to the crushing effect that live burial would have on the victim—reminiscent of the Vestal's death sentence. Despite the fact that, in the case of the Vestals, death came about by slow starvation and dehydration during entombment, it is not unreasonable to assume an association between the two forms of execution. In Propertius' elegy (4, 4), Tarpeia is besotted with Tattius, and is ready to throw open the gates of Rome—and her body—for him. Propertius calls Tarpeia's tomb 'shameful' (*turpe sepulcrum*), and refers to her as a 'wicked girl' (*mala puella*), for whom just one death cannot be enough. He states that the Vesta is shamed by her infamy (*et ualeat probro Vesta pudenda meo*), her actions are criminal, and that she described herself as 'a shameless woman chosen to look after the virgin hearth' (*improba uirgineo lecta ministra foco*). She was feared as a foreign queen, conjuring up memories of the *fatale monstrum* that was Cleopatra.

So much for the 'ancient history' of the Vestals. In time, their protocols and privileges became established in the Roman state religion. Initiations took place every five years or so; candidates were originally elected by lot, from a group of twenty or so girls aged between six and ten. They served for thirty years (ten in an apprenticeship, ten as a Vestal, and ten as a Vestal teacher), after which they were let go, given dowries, and were free to marry—should they wish to do so. Not many did; superstition had it that such marriages were ill-omened. The chief Vestal was obviously the most senior, while three of the five remaining were considered to be more senior than the other two. To be considered for election, the girl's parents had to still be alive and their background and family history had to be above question; they had to be free-born, of Italian origin, and of patrician birth. Anyone associated with an undesirable occupation was barred, and candidates were not allowed to have any disabilities—specifically speech impediments (*lingua debili*) or hearing defects. Later, when recruitment became an increasing problem, membership was opened to plebeians—when the problem became even worse, this was extended to the daughters of freedmen.

Tacitus emphasises the patriotism implicit in putting one's daughter forward for selection. He records that in AD 19 two girls were competing for one vacancy; the unsuccessful candidate was the daughter of Fonteius Agrippa, whose parents had divorced. The successful girl's mother was a *univira*, wife of Comicia Pollio. However, all was not lost; in a demonstration

of how important the Vestals were, Tiberius awarded the unsuccessful candidate 1 million sesterces in compensation for her failure.¹⁷ The rites of initiation into the college bore similarities to regular marriage ceremonies, with initiates delivered to the *Pontifex Maximus*. They wore a head-dress (the *flammeum*) and six braids, all characteristic of typical bridal wear.¹⁸

The *Lex Papia* governed the filling of vacancies. The selection ceremony was called a ‘capture’ (*captio*). Once captured, the girl was taken from her parents; on entering the atrium of the Temple of Vesta, the girl was taken from the *patria potestas* of her father and fell under the goddess’s control and protection for the next thirty years. Indeed, she left her family completely, and was no longer anyone’s next of kin. She could not inherit from her relations, and if she herself died intestate, everything went to the state, to help pay for her colleagues, their sacrifices, and their ceremonies. Vestals could, however, make wills, and they were free to dispose of their property.

Through Aulus Gellius, Fabius Pictor preserves for us the prayer which greeted each initiate: ‘I take you, Amata, to be a Vestal priestess, who will carry out sacred rites which it is the law for a Vestal priestess to perform on behalf of the Roman people, on the same terms as her who was a Vestal’, ‘on the best terms’—in other words, with all the benefits due to a Vestal.¹⁹ Amata is thought to be the name of the first Vestal taken in this way. The initiate then entered the Atrium Vestae, where her hair was shorn and hung on a tree called the ‘Capillata’.²⁰ She donned her robe and the fillet (*vitta*) for her cropped hair. The dress of the Vestals was distinctive: it comprised white shoes made from the skin of sacrificial animals, a woollen *infula* or fillet, the *suffibulum* (the white woollen veil worn during ritual ceremonies and sacrifices), the *interula* (vest) next to their skin, and a *palla* (a long shawl draped over the left shoulder). The hairstyle of the Vestals consisted of six or seven braids, reminiscent of those worn by Roman brides.²¹ Vestals received a payment on joining, and a yearly stipend thereafter; by the time of the Empire, as much as 2 million sesterces were paid out—twice the dowry of a rich girl. The remuneration came to be as much a bribe as anything, given the increasing difficulty in finding candidates.

When a Vestal died, the selection process for the replacement was less rigorous. They did not have to be young, or even virgins—widows and divorcees were admissible. Some Vestals served for longer than thirty years. Tacitus tells us that Occia, a Chief Vestal, served for fifty-seven years until AD 19, while Junia Torquata, ‘a woman of old-fashioned goodness’, had served for sixty-four years by AD 22.²² Other long-serving Vestals were Cloelia Torquata (from AD 225–257) and Flavia Publicia (from AD 257 to beyond AD 283).

The House of the Vestal Virgins, the *atrium Vestae*, was behind the Temple of Vesta. The Pontifex Maximus lived in the *domus publicae* nearby. The *atrium Vestae* was a three-story, fifty-room palace, built around an *atrium*; it featured a statue of Numa Pompilius, the founder of the cult.

The Chief Vestal (*Virgo Vestalis Maxima* or *Vestaliū Maxima*) managed the other five. She was a particularly important figure in the state religion, and was a member of the College of Pontiffs. The *Collegium Pontificum* dispensed justice if a Vestal ever transgressed. It comprised the most senior priests of the state religion—the Pontifex Maximus and the other *pontifices*, the *Rex Sacrorum*, the fifteen *flamens*, and the Vestals. The last chief Vestal we know of was Cloelia Concordia, who was appointed in AD 380. She resigned in AD 394 after Theodosius I closed the Temple of Vesta in AD 391 and allowed the flame to go out; she later converted to Christianity.

The fact that Vestal Virgins enjoyed privileges reserved for married women (*matronae*) and men further highlights the sexual ambiguity of their status, and throws into relief their vulnerability and the fragility of their reputations. As women—and virginal women at that—they were, in other aspects, uncomfortably close to their married counterparts. It has been suggested that the paradox here accounts for their very sanctity—the very private and very public functions, and the responsibility for private and state religion, all served to blur the lines of religious and sometimes sexual propriety.

As well as keeping the flame alight, and thereby ensuring the endurance of the Roman state and the sanctity of public sacrifices, the Vestal Virgins had a number of other exclusive festal responsibilities that were important to the state and to state religion.²³ On 13 February they participated in the Parentatio, the worship of the dead at the tomb of the Vestal Tarpeia. Two days later, the distributed *mola salsa* at the Lupercalia; on 17 February they presided at Fornacalia in honour of Fornax, goddess of ovens, to ensure the smooth baking of bread. On 1 March they rekindled the fire with the *Pontifex Maximus*; on 16 and 17 March they visited the *Sacra Argeorum*, the twenty-four sacred places consecrated by Numa for religious services. On 15 April the foetuses of calves were ripped from the wombs of thirty-one slaughtered cows at the festival of Fordicidia; the foetuses were cremated and their ashes were stored in the *penus* (in the Temple of Vesta) until the Pales (21 April), when they were scattered to purify the people. People ritually jumped over a mixture of the blood and ashes, which had been poured over burning straw at the feast of the shepherds (the *Parilia*), the anniversary of the founding of Rome. On 28 August the Vestals celebrated the establishment of the Temple of Vesta by Augustus on the Palatine; 1 May saw them marking the *Bona Dea*, repeated on the night of 3–4 December. Between 7–15 May, the three most-senior Vestals reaped the first ears of corn for that year's *mola salsa*; in mid-May, they threw straw men (*argei*) into the Tiber from the Pons Sublicius. Vesta was celebrated at the Vestalia from 7–15 June; on the first day of the festivities, the *penus Vestae*, the *sanctum sanctorum*, was opened—the only time of the year that women were permitted to offer sacrifice. The *Aedes* was ritually swept on the last day of the Vestalia, or *quando stercum delatum fas*; this was an ancient ritual from the time when animal dung was

swept up and thrown down the *Porta Stercoraria*. The festival of Consus, the god of advice and harvest, was celebrated on 21 August; Ops Cosiva, the goddess of seeding, was also marked on this day. In October, the blood from the slaughtered ‘October horse’ was stored in the *penus* until next year’s Fordicidia.

Paradoxically for the Vestals, the Lupercalia was associated with fertility. Apart from the *mola salsa* and the Vestal Virgins, it involved much conviviality and the unusual sacrifice of goats and dogs: their skins were cut into strips (*februa*, hence our February), and used by two specially-chosen half-naked youths to whip the women. Any barren woman thus touched would become fertile.

The ceremony of the Argei (Argives, or grey-haired ones) represented cleansing and (ironically for the Vestals) regeneration. It involved the Vestal Virgins, the Pontifex Maximus, the Praetor, one other magistrate, and the Flaminica Dialis in mourning. They processed to the Pons Sublicius and threw twenty-four straw dummies (six for each region of Rome) into the Tiber. Ovid relates the origins of the rite in the *Fasti*, including the possibility that originally frail old men were thrown into the river by young men, to secure the exclusive right to vote.²⁴ The ritual lived on for centuries; according to Varro, old men were pushed away from the polling booths (*septa*) with the cry, ‘*sexagenarios de ponte!*’²⁵

Mola salsa was made in May, ready for the Vestalia and the Lupercalia on 15 February—an instance of the Vestal’s special dispensation to help in the preparation of sacrifices, hence our word ‘immolation’. However, Vestals never performed sacrifices of live animals—*mola salsa* was a mixture of coarse-ground, toasted emmer wheat and salt. Emmer wheat (*triticumdicoccum*) is also known as farro, or hulled wheat. It was sprinkled on the forehead and crumbled between the horns of animals before they were sacrificed on the altar and in the sacred fire. According to Pliny, Numa Pompilius is said to have introduced the practice as a bloodless sacrifice (also *februa*).²⁶

Two other apparent paradoxes were the Fordicidia and the Parilia, both also associated with fertility. These festivals saw a pregnant cow sacrificed to Tellus (the earth); the Vestals mixed the ashes of the burnt unborn calves with the horse’s blood, distributing the mixture to the shepherds to disinfect their flocks, ensure fertility, and a ready supply of milk.

The Vestals and the Salii (the priests of Mars) had the responsibility of looking after the Palladium and other sacred relics. Cicero’s speech, the *Pro Fonteio*, makes it abundantly clear that one of the daily Vestal functions was the offering of public prayers.²⁷ Cicero pleads on behalf of Marcus Fonteius, claiming that his Vestal Virgin sister, Fonteia, would have no one left in the world if she lost him—other women had recourse to men and could bear children, but not Vestal Virgins like Fonteia.

Each Vestal carried a *sesepeita*—a sacrificial knife. Every morning they

purified the temple with water originally drawn from the Egerian fountain, although later it was acceptable to use any water so long as it had not run through pipes.

Participation by the Vestals in sacrifice is significant, as women were generally excluded from sacrifices. In abridging the second-century AD Festus, Paulus Diaconus tells us that women and girls were banished (*exesto!*) from sacrificial rites, along with convicts and foreigners. The concessions made to Sabine women after their abduction by the Romans included a ban on grinding corn or preparing meat—tantamount to a ban on preparing sacrifices. The prohibition on women drinking sacrificial wine (*temetum*) reinforced this enduring exclusion.

During the Vestalia, donkeys were celebrated to mark their valuable role as turners of the millstones in the making of bread—specifically, a staple of *mola salsa*. Donkeys and millstones were garlanded with bread and flowers. The origin of the donkey in Vestal history stems from the story that a donkey was Vesta's saviour when Priapus attempted to rape her; this accounts for the presence of a donkey in some depictions of the goddess. Its sexual prowess forms part of the paradox that surrounds the Vestals, as does the phallus, which is sometimes shown in the flames of their fire. The first day of the Vestalia was a holiday for bakers and millers; in the case of the former, it was to celebrate the fact that in ancient times Roman bread was baked in the hearth rather than in ovens.²⁸

On a more public and political level, Vestals were prominent at Sulla's funeral, they were at the front of the procession to meet Octavian after the Battle of Actium, and they attended the dedication of the Ara Pacis, on which they are depicted. When Livia, widow of Augustus, was consecrated, the Vestals took on the responsibility for her cult.²⁹ In a more secular context, both Julius Caesar and Augustus deposited their wills with the Vestals, underscoring the reputation for trust and security enjoyed by the college. Appian and Dio both report that a treaty signed by Pompey and Octavian was deposited with them.

The Vestals were finally disbanded in AD 394, but not before a small number had been entombed alive—the awful penalty for a Vestal who had lost her virginity (*incestum*), or was accused of having lost it. *Incestum* was tantamount to treason. Dionysius of Halicarnassus records that the first Alba Longa Vestals were whipped to death for breaking their vows of celibacy, and that any resulting infant offspring was thrown into the nearest river. Dionysius attributes live burial to Tarquinius Priscus, and says that the first victim was Pinaria; Opimia followed, confessing under torture.³⁰ Sometimes the 'immuration' was preceded by whipping, as endured by Urbinia in 471 BC. Under Numa Pompilius, the earlier punishment of choice for unchaste Vestal Virgins was death by stoning.

The entombment occurred in a cellar under the Campus Sceleratus; the male partner was flogged to death in the Comitium like a slave (*sub furca*).

The reasoning behind live entombment was that Vesta would still have time to rescue the ‘Virgin’ if she was innocent. Vesta never did. Plutarch wonders if entombment was decided upon because the Romans thought it somehow inappropriate that someone charged with looking after the fire should be cremated—the usual penalty—or that one so sacrosanct should be murdered.³¹ He graphically describes the solemn process where the condemned Vestal is bound and gagged, dressed as if she is a corpse, and carried to her subterranean prison in a curtained litter; she is unbound and, after a prayer, the *Pontifex Maximus* puts her on a ladder which leads to the small chamber below. The ladder would be hauled up, and the entrance would be closed and covered with earth. The chamber was sparsely furnished, containing only a bed, a lamp, and a small amount of bread, water, milk, and oil. To Plutarch, this was the most shocking spectacle in the world; when it occurred, it was the most horrific day Rome had ever seen.³²

According to Livy, in 420 BC the Vestal Postumia was tried for a sexual misdemeanour on the basis of her elegant, bright dress sense and her precocious wit, but she was found innocent. Postumia was acquitted, but she was warned by the *Pontifex Maximus* to curb her sense of humour and to dress more modestly. He:

...gave her warning to leave her sports, taunts, and merry conceits; and in her raiment to seem not so deft as devout, and wear her garments rather saintly than sightly.³³

Livy says that Minucia, the first plebeian Vestal, also aroused suspicion with her fashionable attire; she was arrested on the evidence of a slave. Minucia was found guilty of unchastity and buried alive in 337 BC; her fate was just as likely to have been determined by her plebeian birth as an ill-judged dress sense. Livy matter-of-factly tells us how in 273 BC, ‘Sextilia, a Vestal Virgin, was accused of unchastity and buried’ (*‘Sextilia, virgo Vestalis, damnata incesti viva defossa est’*).³⁴ Orosius adds ‘alive’ (*‘viva’*).³⁵ Caparronia hung herself in 266 BC when she was accused of *incestum*, and her slaves and defiler were executed. An anonymous Vestal was entombed in 236 BC.

In 114 BC, Aemilia, Licinia, and Martia were executed on the evidence of Manius, the servant of Eutetius, a barbarian horseman, who made allegations of serial sexual impropriety. Initially, only Aemilia was sentenced to death, but there was much opposition to this clemency; the tribune, Sextus Peducaeus, passed a law censuring the pontifical college, and Licinia and Martia were re-tried by the praetor and lawyer Lucius Cassius Longinus Ravilla. They were found guilty in a special court (*quaestio*) and sentenced to death. In effect, the authority and jurisdiction of the *Pontifex Maximus* had been circumvented and usurped here; the Vestal Virgins had become public and political property. Two Sibylline prophecies apparently supported the final verdicts. It seems the three Vestals were guilty of prostitution—however, given the reputation of Manius for being something of a pimp, it seems likely

that the charges were exaggerated and triggered by a prodigy. However, there is little doubt that one of the most revered institutions in Rome was seriously compromised by this impropriety and the way the case was handled.

Fabia Terentia, chief Vestal, was a half-sister of Terentia, Cicero's first wife. In 73 BC she was acquitted of *incestum* with Lucius Sergius Catilina. In the same year, another Vestal, Licinia, was supposedly stalked by her cousin, Marcus Licinius Crassus—who, according to Plutarch, was eyeing up her suburban villa.³⁶ He was accused of criminal intimacy with Licinia, and she was accused of *incestum*. Both were acquitted on the grounds that Crassus's visits were actually in pursuit of the possible purchase of Licinia's villa. Once again, the trials were held in a secular court; Fabia was defended by Marcus Piso. The pontifical grip on the Vestals was further relaxed when a *Lex Papia* was passed in 65 BC, allowing lots to be drawn by the people to select a Vestal from twenty girls chosen by the *Pontifex Maximus*. In the early Empire, Suetonius says that Nero raped the Vestal Virgin Rubria.³⁷

Vestal Virgins sometimes took the blame when catastrophe struck; indeed, many of the prosecutions for Vestal *incestum* coincided with crises and times of imminent danger to the state. It was almost as if an external reason had to be found to explain or justify the calamity, almost as if the state was breathing a collective sigh of relief that the questionable chastity of a Vestal Virgin was a contributory factor in the crisis. For example, their alleged *incestum* was held responsible for the catastrophic slaughter at the Battle of Cannae in 216 BC. Two Vestals, Opimia and Floronia, were duly convicted; one was entombed, while the other committed suicide. Lucius Cantilius, the secretary of the Pontiffs, was beaten to death for deflowering Floronia.³⁸ This case illustrates the contrived nature of many of the Vestal convictions, and indicates the pains which the authorities were at to justify their actions in times of crises. The rationale was that national calamity must have been caused by some prodigy or other, or by fornication on the part of a Vestal; the Sibylline Books would be consulted as an endorsement, and the Delphic oracle may even have been visited for further proof.

On the other hand, the sacrosanctity of the Vestals was powerful; it was clearly evident when Appius Claudius Pulcher defeated the Salassi in the Val d'Aosta, and demanded a triumph. When this was refused he organised one himself, at his own expense, enlisting the help of his second daughter, Claudia, who was a Vestal Virgin. Her sacred presence on the triumphal chariot deterred intervention by the College of tribunes, and the power of her sanctity won the day for her father. The Vestals were also instrumental in Cicero's decision to execute the conspirators arrested after the Catiline conspiracy; during the rites of the Bona Dea in 63 BC, while he was vacillating between execution and pardon, the sacred flame went out and then shot back into life. This was seen by the Vestals as a sign that Cicero had to do his best to ensure the safety of Rome, and that in doing so he would gain glory and be safe because of Vesta. In the same year, Licinia used her

influence to support Licinius Murena, a kinsman of hers, in his bid for the consulship of 62 BC; she did this by (very publicly) giving him her privileged seat at the Games. The Vestal Virgins interceded on the behalf of Julius Caesar during his row with Sulla over his wife, Cornelia, and his refusal to divorce her. With the help of the Vestals, Sulla's henchmen were called off and Caesar gained a pardon. An inscription from AD 240 describes a Vestal using her power as a patron to Aemilius Pardalas; Chief Vestal Campia Severina saw to it that Pardalas was promoted to equestrian rank, and given the command of an auxiliary cohort (the Aquitanica).³⁹

Their power and influence was also evident in Vibidia's role as an intermediary between Claudius and Messalina, in her ill-starred and ill-judged marriage to Silius; Vibidia demanded that the Emperor should allow Messalina to offer a defence. Vestals acted as envoys for Vitellius in AD 69—the year of the four Emperors—to negotiate a truce with the Flavian armies.

We have seen how the presence of the Vestal Virgins at the 62 BC Bona Dea affair only served to heighten the scandal and embarrassment. The Bona Dea cult first appeared in Rome in around 272 BC, during the Tarentine War; Bona Dea was associated with chastity, fertility, and the protection of Rome, and, as Fauna, she could prophesy the fates of women. She had two festivals, one at her temple on the Aventine and the other at the home of the *Pontifex Maximus*. Her Aventine cult, in which a blood sacrifice took place on 1 May, was re-dedicated by the Vestal Virgin Licinia in 123 BC, but this was annulled as unlawful by the Senate. Licinia was later charged with unchastity and entombed.⁴⁰ The transvestic, sacrilegious intrusion of Publius Clodius Pulcher that night, in pursuit of an adulterous liaison with Caesar's wife, cannot have failed to reflect badly on the Vestal Virgins. Their sanctity was compromised, and this was accredited to the displeasure of the gods at the political mayhem of the day. Caesar distanced himself from Pompeia by divorcing her, and Clodius was tried for sacrilege—but he was acquitted, much to Cicero's displeasure.

As we have already noted, important state papers and the wills of eminent statesmen and Emperors were kept in the care of the Vestal Virgins in the Atrium, their building. Various vital documents owned by Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Mark Antony were all secured there. Augustus deposited the two handwritten books of his will with them; one of a further three sealed books contained instructions for his funeral. Augustus also placed there the manuscript of his highly-selective and rather-vainglorious *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, an account of his triumphs, ovations, lands conquered, legislation, and census figures. The sacrosanctity of the Vestals failed to stop Octavian shocking the Senate by raiding the Vestal vaults, stealing Antony's will, and publicly criticising it in the Senate house.

The Vestal Virgins were the stuff of legend, and provided a fertile source of copy for the historians. One Vestal, Aemilia, saw that a colleague had allowed the flame to go out, provoking questions about her chastity; Aemilia

reacted by praying to Vesta and throwing a cloth onto the cold embers. When this burst miraculously and spontaneously into flame, all questioning ceased. Tuccia endured the same calamity, but absolved herself by fetching water from the Tiber in a sieve without losing a single drop. She said, 'Vesta, if I have always used pure hands in pursuit of your mystical service, fix it that I can draw water from the Tiber with this sieve and bring it to your temple.'⁴¹

The goddess Cybele was brought to Rome in 204 BC, after consultation of the Sibylline Books revealed that victory over the Carthaginians could be ensured by her presence in the city. According to Livy, the Books decreed that any foe would be expelled if the Idaean mother was brought from Pessinus to Rome. A delegation was promptly dispatched to Phrygia, to bring back a meteoric stone symbolising the deity. King Attalus I had originally brought the stone from Pessinus to Pergamum, and lodged it in the Megalesion shrine there. Publius Cornelius Scipio (the future Nasica) was the official receiver at Ostia, chosen as the noblest man (*vir optimus*) in Rome at the time; he handed the 'goddess' over to a delegation of *matronae* and a Vestal, who took her on to Rome. According to Herodian, the Vestal Virgin was Quinta Claudia, whose *pudicitia* had been causing some concern.⁴² However, she scotched all rumours and emphatically restored her reputation that day; the boat carrying the delegation ran aground in the Tiber, and soothsayers declared that it could only be re-floated by a woman whose reputation was above doubt. Claudia rescued the boat using her girdle—and, at the same time, salvaged her reputation. The Magna Mater was duly installed in the Temple of Victory, on the Palatine. Iconographic evidence includes a statue of Claudia in the Temple of Cybele (described by Tacitus and by Valerius Maximus), a coin of Faustina showing Claudia pulling the boat along, and an altar with a similar depiction (now in the Capitoline Museum).

Caligula eccentrically rewarded his three sisters by making them honorary Vestal Virgins—a characteristically odd elevation, given that all three were married and one of them (Agrippina) was pregnant, carrying Nero.

Domitian was particularly suspicious of the moral rectitude of the Vestal Virgins; he brought a number of them to trial in AD 83 and AD 90, in a bid to improve the moral climate (*Correctio Morum*). It seems that the Vestals had mislaid their moral compasses under Vespasian and Titus, and were virtually running a brothel in the Atrium. In AD 83, the Oculata sisters and Varronilla were given the option to commit suicide (*liberum mortis arbitrium*), while their lovers were exiled. Seven years later, Chief Vestal Cornelia was condemned to the living death of entombment; her lover was whipped to death. In a final act of defiance, she shrank from the hands of her executioner as he tried to un-snag her clothing from the ladder—as if to give one final expression of her chastity. According to Herodian, Caracalla burned a number of Vestals alive in around AD 211.⁴³

Vestal Virgins were sometimes sacrificial lambs in games of political intrigue. In 114 BC, three were charged with *incestum* after the daughter of an

equestrian was struck by lightning and found with her tongue cut out and her clothing hitched up around her waist. The *haruspices* smelled a scandal involving a virgin and a knight. One of the Vestal Virgins was convicted; the other two were initially acquitted, but were condemned the following year after a retrial was demanded by Sextus Peducaeus, tribune for 113 BC. He accused his rival, the *Pontifex Maximus* L. Metellus Delmaticus, of partiality.⁴³ A special prosecutor, Lucius Cassius Longinus, was appointed, and he delivered guilty verdicts. In 73 BC, two Vestals became embroiled in the Catiline conspiracy; Fabia, the half-sister of Cicero's wife Terentia, was accused of having an affair with Catiline, while Licinia was accused of consorting with Crassus, her cousin.⁴⁴ Both were acquitted, but mud sticks; soon afterwards, neither Vestal was present at a particular religious event described by Macrobius, although their four colleagues were.⁴⁵ No doubt these two were selected to stay back at the temple, fanning the flames. In AD 220, a sacrilegious *Elegabalus* divorced his wife and controversially married a Vestal, Julia Aquilia Severa, after arranging special dispensation for her to renounce her vows of chastity; his aim was to produce god-like children. Additionally, he moved the Vestal flame to his temple on the Palatine along with other sacred objects, so that he was the only god worshipped in Rome. He also broke into the *penus* in the Temple of Vesta, which was off-limits even to him. Cassius Dio thought he should have been whipped, as anyone else who violated a Vestal's purity would have been.⁴⁶

In other ways the Vestal Virgins enjoyed a certain emancipation and considerable respect; according to the *Twelve Tables*, they were unique amongst women in that they were free from the power of the *paterfamilias* and unbound by guardianship (*tutela*). The *Pontifex Maximus* could punish them for transgressions or negligence, but his power ended there. Their emancipation from guardianship allowed them to vote in elections, make wills, and dispose of their property—a privilege usually only extended to men, or later to women who had three children (or four if they were a freedwoman). Their person was sacrosanct; it was a capital offence to assault or injure a Vestal. They could testify in court and give evidence without the usual oath, and their word was trusted without question; the first beneficiary of this was Gaia Taracia (also known as Fufetia) in the time of Romulus. Vestals were exempt from the sumptuary *lex Voconia* of 169 BC. They were permitted to ride in a covered, two-wheeled, horse-drawn wagon (the *carpentum*), which demonstrated their high status; it was also a capital offence to pass under a Vestal's litter. They were preceded in the street by a *lictor*, a privilege usually only enjoyed by magistrates and priests, who cleared a path through the crowds. Consuls and praetors made way for them in the street, lowering their *fascēs*. The *fascēs* were the tied bundle of wooden rods, sometimes including an axe, which were a sacred symbol of a magistrate's power and jurisdiction. If a Vestal encountered a prisoner *en route* to his or her execution, then it was in their gift to deliver a pardon. The 45 BC *Lex*

Julia Municipalis allowed them to drive in their carriages in Rome at times when other traffic was excluded. They could sit in some of the best seats at the theatre or amphitheatre, while other women were restricted to the ‘gods’. The privileges enjoyed by Vestal Virgins were held in such esteem that ladies of the Imperial households were said to have ‘the rights of Vestals’, and they were often portrayed on coins as Vestal Virgins. Other perks included the right to attend sumptuous religious banquets; four Vestals attended one in 69 BC, celebrating the appointment of a new *Flamen Martialis*—the thirty courses included asparagus and oysters. Unlike most people, the Vestals could be buried within the city walls of Rome. Pliny tells us that even in his day some people believed a Vestal Virgin could root a runaway slave to the spot with one glance, provided he or she was still within the city of Rome; such was the supposed power of chastity and virginity.⁴⁷

Unsurprisingly, the prospect of thirty years of celibacy (or of being entombed alive if suspected of and convicted of *incestum*) did not always deliver a ready supply of Vestals. We already know that Augustus attempted to increase recruitment by allowing the daughters of freedmen to serve.⁴⁸ He also excused the daughters from families which had three children; while this did nothing for the shortage of Vestal Virgins, it probably made a small contribution to his efforts to increase the faltering birth-rate.⁴⁹

In around AD 200, Minucius Felix demonstrated a perhaps typically Christian attitude towards the Vestals. With a little exaggeration, he derides their reputation for chastity:

...among very many of the virgins unchastity was punished, in that they, doubtless without the knowledge of Vesta, had intercourse too carelessly with men; and for the rest their impunity arose not from the better protection of their chastity, but from the better fortune of their immodesty. And where are adulteries better arranged by the priests than among the very altars and shrines? Where are more panderings debated, or more acts of violence concerted? Finally, burning lust is more frequently gratified in the little chambers of the keepers of the temple, than in the brothels themselves.⁵⁰

Hyperbole or not, the writing was on the wall; the college was disbanded in AD 394, after 1,100 years of service.

Nevertheless, the power and influence of the Vestals endured even beyond the very end. In his *New History*, Zosimus tells us how the Christian Serena, niece of Theodosius, went into the redundant temple of Vesta in around AD 400, took the necklace from the statue of the goddess, and put it on. The last remaining Vestal appeared; she chastised Serena and wished all manner of punishments on her, on her husband, and on her children for her impiety; ‘she upbraided her with such a wicked action even to her teeth, she not only gave her very ill language, but commanded her attendants to carry or drive her away’.⁵¹ Serena was then haunted by nightmares—which predicted her early death by strangulation.

Powerful and Political Women: Terentia, Fulvia, and Octavia

Roman women were beginning to exert themselves politically, even making forays into the fringes of the exclusively male military world; this is evidenced by the actions of Busa in 216 BC, after the catastrophe of the Battle of Cannae. Stragglers from the battle made their way to Canusium, in Apulia, where the extremely wealthy Busa fed them, clothed them, and provided them with money. A force of 10,000 men was eventually assembled, which Publius Scipio was able to turn into a fighting unit to face Hannibal again. Busa's loyalty and beneficence was seen with envy by some, to the extent that the neighbouring town of Venusia (not to be outdone) recruited a force of cavalry and infantry. Busa was honoured by the Senate for her unique military escapade.¹

However, Busa was by no means the first example of strong-minded Roman women with initiative. That privilege belongs to Lavinia, the legendary second wife of Aeneas, founder of Rome. When she was widowed, Lavinia took on the role of regent until Ascanius, her step-son, was old enough to rule independently. Indeed, when he assumed full legal responsibility one of his first acts was to found a new settlement in the Alban Hills, leaving Lavinia to rule Lavinium. Livy tells us that she was a very talented woman (*tanta indoles in Lavinia erat*); she obviously was if she was able to govern in such a hostile and unpredictable environment. Significantly, this capable and strong women was instrumental in the very birth of Rome.²

Sound diplomatic skills in a tricky military situation are also evident in Hersilia, wife of Romulus. The Antemnates had attacked the Romans, hoping to take them off guard, but Romulus rallied his troops and routed the attackers. The wives of the defeated soldiers appealed to Hersilia to intercede and convince Romulus to show mercy to the survivors. This she did, showing her husband the long-term benefits of integrating the Antemnates, growing the Roman population, and therefore the army.³

Despite their marginalisation by the male-dominated Roman society, their social and forensic subordination to men, their exclusion from public office and the military, and their political insignificance, early Roman history gives us a number of examples of 'troublesome' women exerting themselves publicly and politically. Livy tells us how the Sabine women—wives and mothers now—rose up to form a human wedge between their warring husbands, brothers, and fathers, when the Sabines attacked Rome; they successfully averted the carnage which would have occurred, declaring that

they would rather die than allow the conflict to continue and render them widows and orphans. The fighting stopped, and the Romans and the Sabines became one.⁴

Women averted the Volscian attack on Rome led by Gaius Marcius Coriolanus in 491 BC; where envoys and priests had failed to placate Coriolanus, the women of Rome, ‘a powerful body of women’ (*ingens mulierum agmen*), sought out his mother and his wife, Veturia and Volumnia. The women persuaded them to go into the lines, taking Coriolanus’s two young sons with them for pathos and *pietas*, and to implore him to withdraw, arguing that ‘where men failed to defend the city with their swords, women may be more successful with their tears and petitions’. Moved by the presence of his close family—and by an angry and impassioned Veturia, who appealed to his duty as a son and to Rome—Coriolanus relented and withdrew his army. Veturia’s success was no doubt assured when she reminded Coriolanus how much she had sacrificed for him; she provided him an education and remained *univira* after his father’s death, making her mother, father, sister, nurse, and teacher to him.⁵

As we have seen, it was a crowd of sympathetic women who congregated to help Lucius Verginius against Appius Claudius in 450 BC; Claudius had abducted Verginia, Verginius’s daughter, on her way to school one day. Servius, in his commentary on the *Aeneid*, writes how women banded together, donating their gold and hair to make bowstrings for the Roman archers, during the siege of the Capitol by the Gauls in 390 BC.⁶

Livy further illustrates collective woman-power when he describes how they supported the 195 BC proposal to repeal the *Lex Oppia* of 215 BC by blockading the houses of the tribunes, the Iunii Bruti.⁷ The *Lex Oppia* restricted the use of luxuries by women in the wake of the catastrophic Battle of Cannae. It limited the amount of gold women could own, and required all the assets of women to be handed over to the state. The wearing of dresses with purple trim and riding in carriages within Rome or nearby towns was also prohibited, except during religious festivals. However, the feeling amongst these elite women was that the law had served its purpose and run its course. Livy records the speech given by Marcus Porcius Cato, and Cato’s embarrassment and disgust at this public demonstration, which he saw as indecorous behaviour, ill-befitting Roman women. He lamented the passing of the days of the ancestors, who did not permit women to carry out public activity or commercial dealings without a guardian, and who defended the power of fathers and husbands. Cato is appalled by this populist, womanly action.⁷ Nevertheless, the repeal was upheld—thanks in no small part to the rational arguments of Lucius Valerius:

For a long time our matrons lived by the highest standards of behaviour without any law, what is the risk when it is repealed, that they will give in to luxury? ... Are we to forbid only women to wear purple? When you, a man,

can use purple on your clothes, can you not permit the mother of your family to have a purple cloak, and will you let your horse be more finely saddled than your wife is dressed?

One woman exerted power over the recently-divorced dictator Sulla. Valeria was certainly beautiful and aristocratic—being the sister of Hortensius, the famous orator, she probably qualified as a *docta puella* (an educated young woman). She and Sulla met at a gladiatorial show in the days when seating was not segregated; Valeria coquettishly removed a piece of wool from Sulla's toga, explaining that she wanted a token of his good luck. The two spent the show glancing at each other and, after making enquiries regarding her circumstances, Sulla (wasting no time) made arrangements for their marriage.⁸

Plutarch tells us about Praecia, a beauty and a wit who was instrumental in helping Lucius Licinius Lucullus win the governorship of Cilicia in 74 BC—and, subsequently, the much-sought-after command against Mithridates. Though Praecia was little more than a prostitute according to Plutarch, she had a reputation as something of a fixer and wielded great influence and power. She began an affair with the equally influential and dissolute Publius Cornelius Cethegus, arch-enemy of Lucullus. She was soon dictating everything Cethegus did: 'nothing important was done in which Cethegus was not involved, and nothing by Cethegus without Praecia'. Lucullus saw his chance, and proceeded to insinuate his way into Praecia's affections to the extent that Cethegus was soon backing Lucullus for the governorship. Lucullus won his command and dispensed with the services of Praecia and Cethegus.⁹

Sempronia was actively involved in the Cataline conspiracy and denigrated by Sallust, despite her manifest intellect and artistic talent. Caerellia was a good friend of Cicero; she owned properties in Asia, was involved in various financial transactions, and was something of an intellectual.¹⁰

Women sometimes played an important and assertive role in some families when crises loomed. After the assassination of Julius Caesar, the family meeting (*consilium*) called by Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus at Antium included three powerful women: Servilia Caepionis (b. c. 104 BC, d. after 42 BC), the long-term mistress of Caesar, mother of Brutus, and Cato the Younger's half-sister; Porcia Catonis, Brutus's wife and cousin; and Servilia's youngest daughter, Junia Tertia or Tertulla (c. 60 BC–AD 22). Servilia is reported to have influenced even the rigorously conservative Cato, and actually ran the *consilium*. Cicero tells us that she made efforts to have the derisory grain commission (*curatio frumanti*) removed from a senatorial decree outlining post-assassination appointments for Cassius and Brutus. In 63 BC Servilia had caused a scandal in the Senate during a debate on the Catiline conspirators. She sent a love letter to Julius Caesar; her half-brother

Cato (who was on the opposite side to Caesar in the debate) accused Caesar of corresponding with the conspirators, and embarrassingly demanded that the letter be read out. Servilia was still an influential force with Caesar after the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, when he gave orders for Brutus to be shown clemency even though he had defected to Pompey. Suetonius describes the fabulously expensive pearl (worth 6 million sesterces) she had received from Caesar, and how she offered Tertulla to him when she felt that his interest in her was waning.¹¹ This happened around the time of an auction where Caesar sold Servilia a number of estates at knock-down prices, causing Cicero to quip that they were an even bigger bargain as they had been further discounted by a third (*tertia*). In 43 BC Servilia chaired another pivotal meeting, which was convened to discuss how they should react to Cicero's plan to ask Brutus to bring his armies to Italy. They also debated what they should do about Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, Servilia's son-in-law, who had joined Mark Antony and been declared an outlaw. P. Servilius Casca (relative and assassin), Labeo (a lawyer), Scaptius (Brutus's agent), and Cicero were also present. Servilia was also the eyes and ears in Rome for Cassius and Brutus when they fled the city. Cicero described her as 'a highly capable and dynamic woman'.

Porcia Catonis (c. 70–43 BC) was the daughter of Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis and his first wife Atilia (later a mistress of Caesar), and the second wife of Brutus. Plutarch describes her as naturally affectionate, conversant with philosophy, spirited, sensible, courageous, and beautiful. Quintus Hortensius Hortalus, the famous orator, tried to forge close links with Cato by requesting the hand of Porcia—who was then already married to Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus, and still fertile. Hortensius's aim was to produce an heir with the combined blood of the Cato family and his own; pragmatically, he was quite prepared to hand Porcia back to Bibulus once an heir was produced. Cato refused (possibly because he wanted to keep Bibulus on side), but he did agree to divorce his own pregnant second wife, Marcia, so that Hortensius (whom he also presumably wanted to favour) could marry her instead. Having dutifully obtained permission from Marcia's father, Philippus, Cato gave Marcia away at the wedding. Marcia was little more than a tool in this episode of old-boy back-scratching. Hortensius died a few years later in 50 BC; there were no children from the marriage. Cato then remarried Marcia, now a very rich woman.

Such was the power and influence of fecundity. Bibulus died in 48 BC; Porcia married Brutus in 45 BC, after he had divorced. Suetonius describes Porcia as brave after an incident in her second marriage, to Brutus; immediately before the assassination of Caesar, it became apparent to Porcia that her husband was unduly distracted and anxious. She was determined to share his concerns, and dramatically proceeded to slash her thigh with a knife, causing a substantial loss of blood. Brutus was alarmed; she told him that she was much more than a sexual partner in their marriage, that she was 'a partner in [his] joys and a partner in [his] sorrows'—for better or for worse. By virtue

of her ancestry and her demonstrable bravery, she claimed that she was above the usual weakness of women, and that she was worthy of his confidence in anything that may have troubled him. Once he had seen her wound, Brutus told her everything; she had proved that she could conquer pain, and he was confident that she would therefore not yield under torture. Valerius Maximus concludes that Porcia was assessing how well she would be able to face suicide in the event of Brutus' death. After Caesar's murder, Porcia and Brutus parted. He fully appreciated her courage; Plutarch says that she was distraught on seeing a painting of Hector leaving Andromache for war, and that when Brutus heard this he declined, out of respect, to repeat Hector's parting words to his Andromache:

...work at your loom and your distaff, and give your commands to your servants. She may not have the strength for the same exploits as are expected of a man, but she had the spirit to fight as nobly for her country as any of us.¹²

Plutarch's source is Bibulus, their son. This is remarkable because it is the first example we have of an enlightened man enjoining his wife to throw away the wool-working and fight for her country as a man does, in spite of her natural physical weakness. How different, then, from Cicero's assertion that it would be awful if women became involved in public affairs, politics, the law, and the army.

Controversy and speculation surround the circumstances of Porcia's death. Some say she committed suicide by swallowing hot coals when she heard that Brutus was dead; others that she died of some chronic disease or other. The former case is rejected by Plutarch, but if it is true then we have another example of her exceptional bravery and dignity.¹³

Mucia Tertia, the daughter of Quintus Mucius Scaevola, had a reputation as a diplomat. However, before this she may well have been something of a provincial celebrity; she and her father were awarded statues at Olympia by the locals of Asia province in 95 BC. If in fact this did occur, then Mucia would be the first woman to receive such an honour. In 62 BC, Cicero appealed to her to intercede with Metellus Nepos, her kinsman, who had vetoed the orator's valedictory speech as consul. She was later sent to Sicily by Octavian, to negotiate with her son, Sextus Pompeius, who was starving Italy with his grain blockade. Mucia was unsuccessful, but a later meeting with Sextus (which included his wife, Scribonia) was fruitful, and led to the 39 BC Treaty of Misenum. This ended the blockade and brought Sextus into the triumvirate. In 31 BC, after Actium, Mucia persuaded Octavian to spare her son by her second marriage, M. Aemilius Scaurus, who had fought with Antony.¹⁴

Caecilia Metella was another woman with a reputation for influence and a purveyor of *amicitia*; Sextus Roscius sought her out as a friend of his father when he was accused of patricide. She recommended Cicero as a defence lawyer, and Roscius was subsequently acquitted. Cicero praised Metella's

Terentia (98 BC–AD 4)

Cicero is well-known as a key player and important commentator in the tumultuous, dangerous, and world-changing events of first-century BC Rome. What is less well-known, however, is the crucial part that his wife Terentia played in supporting him politically, financially, and emotionally. In this respect, she can be said to have influenced Cicero's political thinking, policy, behaviour, and—as a result—some of the major political developments of the time.

It is fairly clear that by the time Terentia came to marry Cicero, a handful of women were beginning to assert themselves in public—standing up for themselves and wielding a degree of independence in financial, social, and political matters that was unheard of half a century beforehand. They trod a very fine line, acting somewhat independently of men but without obviously encroaching beyond what was considered to be respectable behaviour by a woman. Cicero himself records how it was now quite usual for women to discuss politics outside the confines of the family.¹⁶

Terentia was born in 98 BC, into an affluent plebeian family named Terentius. Her half-sister was Fabia, the Vestal Virgin; we have seen how she was accused of *incestum* with Catiline in 73 BC, but was acquitted. Terentia was the elder of the two sisters, and inherited the family's wealth; this included blocks of apartments in Rome, in the Argiletum, and on the Aventine, woodlands in the suburbs, and a large farm—all generating considerable income. She had other investments, and owned a small village.¹⁷ Her dowry amounted to 400,000 sesterces—precisely the amount of money Cicero needed to run for senator. She married him in 79 BC, when she was about nineteen years old and he was twenty-seven. Her new husband was a *novus homo*, not an aristocrat, but a 'new man' on the Roman political stage, with political and financial potential. The dowry would have passed to Cicero's family, but Terentia seemed to have kept control of things with the help of Philotimus—the freedman family financial advisor—whom Cicero disliked and distrusted.

Terentia seems to have performed all the usual domestic duties required of a *matrona*—running the household, managing the slaves, and overseeing the family's religious activity.¹⁸ Their daughter, Tullia Ciceronis, was born in 78 BC, and their son Marcus Tullius Cicero Minor in 65 BC. The house buzzed with intellectuals and professionals; Diodotus, the Stoic philosopher, spent a lot of time there, as did Alexio, a physician. Cicero would have been surrounded by staff to help him with his writing and speeches, including researchers, readers, archivists, and secretaries. Terentia, therefore, would not have been short of the company of clever people and stimulating conversation.

At the end of 63 BC we begin to see evidence of Terentia's influence over Cicero. While sacrificing at the Bona Dea (which was held in their house that year), the flames shot up; the Vestals were in attendance, and they interpreted this as a good omen. Terentia informed Cicero, telling him to proceed with his current policies for the good of the state; if Cicero had been in any doubt as to how to proceed with the issue of the Catiline conspirators in the Senate, then this was now expelled.

In social, religious, and political terms, hosting the Bona Dea was a high point in any elite Roman woman's life, reflecting as it did her status as the wife of one of Rome's senior politicians, surrounded by the cream of female Roman society. According to Cicero, the sense of occasion in 63 BC was heightened by a number of omens, including a lunar eclipse, an earthquake, ghosts, and the death of a man struck by lightning. However, the outcome was that Terentia became implicated with Cicero in accusations of corruption following the trials of the Catiline conspirators; this clearly demonstrates that she was a regular go-between in political and financial matters for her husband and various petitioners.

It all came to a head in 58 BC, when Cicero was exiled on charges of illegally executing the conspirators. The charges were brought by Publius Clodius Pulcher, whose aim was to exact revenge on Cicero for shattering his alibi in the 62 BC Bona Dea scandal. Plutarch uncharitably records that Terentia made Cicero testify against Clodius to prove to her that he was not having an affair with Clodius's sister, Clodia (Catullus's Lesbia). However, Plutarch had an agenda: he was intent on portraying Terentia as an overbearing wife, and Cicero as a weak man, browbeaten by her; Plutarch describes her as having 'a violent will of her own, [and that] she had gained ascendancy over Cicero'.¹⁹

Cicero relied heavily on the support of Terentia during his exile in Thessalonika and Dyrrachium in 58 and 57 BC. His letters to her reflect his isolation, homesickness, and affection for Terentia and their daughter, Tullia. Terentia is the 'most faithful and best of wives ... light of [his] life' (*'fidissima atque optima uxor ... mea lux'*).²⁰ Both she and Tullia (as Cicero affectionately called his daughter) interceded bravely on his behalf during his exile.²¹ They also had to deal with his onerous business affairs, the slaves, and the household, as well as the upbringing of their young son. Terentia remained faithful and supportive even though Cicero was now a non-citizen, and she was no longer his legal wife (*uxor iusta*). There was considerable stigma attached to the wife of an exile: we know this from the relegated Ovid, who tells us that his wife visibly blushed when the subject was raised and that she was ever reminded of the shame attached to being married to a man in exile.

Cicero wrote that he envisaged Terentia day and night doing everything she possibly could to win his reprieve. In actuality, the two women demonstrated ostentatiously by wearing their hair unkempt and donning black mourning clothes, visiting friends in Rome in order to canvas support for

Cicero's return. When their house on the Palatine was torched by Clodius's mob, Terentia sought sanctuary with Fabia in the house of the Vestal Virgins. Terentia kept Cicero up-to-date with the situation in Rome and the progress in their efforts to secure his rehabilitation. Nevertheless, she sensitively spared Cicero the worst news; he was already severely depressed, and she clearly saw little point in revealing to him that she had been dragged from the Temple of Vesta to the Valerian Bank. Cicero later found out about this from a friend, Publius Valerius and later intimates that Terentia was also physically abused.²² Due largely to the valiant efforts of Terentia, Tullia, Atticus, and others, Cicero was able to return to Rome in 57 BC.

Plutarch records how Cicero himself said that Terentia was no shrinking violet, and that she was more active in his political life than she ever was in her domestic affairs:

Terentia was never at any time a shrinking type of woman; she was bold and energetic by nature, ambitious and, as Cicero says himself, was more inclined to take a part in his public life than to share with him any of her domestic responsibilities.²³

This is a good example of the Roman wife and *matrona* taking over responsibilities which were normally the preserve of the man of the household; another opportunity came in 51 BC, when Terentia took charge of finding a third husband for Tullia while Cicero was away on his proconsulship in Cilicia.

Cicero tells us that he effectively suspended his *patria potestas* to allow Terentia to make the necessary arrangements. It was obviously quite impractical for Cicero, in Cilicia, to be involved on a day-to-day basis—the mail service alone precluded that option. A father's consent was a legal requirement where one or both of the partners were under *patria potestas*. Terentia took control of matters and formed a match with the infamous Publius Cornelius Dolabella.²⁴ On the face of it, this was a politically astute choice because it allowed Cicero to keep a foot in the camps of both Caesar and Pompey. Tullia's previous marriages were less controversial; in 67 BC, when she was aged twelve, she was betrothed to her first husband, Gaius Calpurnius Piso Frugi, and she married him in 63 BC. He died in 57 BC; she then became engaged to Furius Crassipes when she was twenty-three; the subsequent marriage was dissolved in 51 BC.²⁵ Terentia later took responsibility for paying the second instalment of Tullia's dowry to Dolabella in 48 BC, when Cicero was in financial straits.

Despite all Terentia's support, and Cicero's appreciation of it, things between them started to turn sour by 48 BC, while the civil war between Caesar and Pompey raged on. Cicero's correspondence appears increasingly disputatious; in a letter to Atticus, he seems to regret the trust he had invested in his wife.²⁶ Plutarch records that Cicero was unhappy with the arrangements Terentia had made for his return home from Brundisium in 48 BC, after the

defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus. She had failed to arrange adequate security and money for Tullia's journey to meet him, while Terentia herself remained at home—much to Cicero's irritation. Plutarch also mentions that Terentia stripped their home of furnishings and possessions, and there seems to have been disagreements over Terentia's will and the legacy of the children.²⁷ The vexed question of her fixing Tullia's marriage and the disquiet it caused were never far away.²⁸ However, Plutarch had his own agenda; in reality, Terentia wanted to go to Brundisium but she did not because Cicero explicitly told her not to. The journey was long and dangerous, and there was nothing she could do there anyway. Tullia arrived there safely, according to Cicero.²⁹ Whatever happened, by 46 BC the couple were divorced; it seems unlikely that Terentia ever saw her substantial dowry again.³⁰

It is hard to tell how far the breakdown was due to Terentia's close management of their finances—a large portion of which came from her dowry—or due to Cicero's venality. The fact that Cicero married soon after their divorce, in December 46 BC, to a rich young girl—Publilia—may suggest the latter. Plutarch says that Terentia believed Cicero to be enchanted by Publilia, but that Tiro (Cicero's freeman editor) ascribed the match to Cicero's need for money to pay off his debts.³¹

Terentia went on to marry again, twice. Her second marriage was said to be to the historian Sallust, while her third was to Messalla Corvinus. She lived to the age of 103, dying in AD 4.³²

Terentia was a rare example of a Republican Roman woman who was very much in control of events and of her destiny. While she exhibited many of the traits of the good *matrona*—a good manageress of the household and the slaves, a competent and frugal financial controller, and a devoted mother to Tullia and Marcus—she also demonstrated characteristics that would have been considered outrageous and decidedly unmatronly a few years beforehand. She was never going to spend all night working the wool, like Lucretia, in the lamplight, and she was not going to sit quietly by, politely listening to Cicero, his friends, and his enemies, like Cornelia. She was conspicuous in her support for her exiled husband and was immodest enough to demonstrate that support publicly, bravely, ostentatiously, and vocally. She patently thrived on the part she played in Cicero's political life, despite the obvious risks this held at such a dangerous time.

Fulvia Flacca Bambula (c. 83–43 BC)

Fulvia Flacca Bambula infamously pricked the decapitated Cicero's tongue with her hairpin; this was the revenge she exacted for Cicero's insinuation that Mark Antony, her third husband, had only married her for her money. After his proscription in 43 BC Cicero's powerful, speech-writing right hand was cut off, and his head was put on public display in the Forum. Fulvia is likened to a man ('a woman in body alone') by Velleius Paterculus, who evidently

regarded her vengeful and gruesome act as unladylike and, by implication, the sort of thing only a man would or could do.³³ This is Dio's account of the atrocity:

Fulvia took the head into her hands before it was removed, and after abusing it spitefully and spitting upon it, set it on her knees, opened the mouth, and pulled out the tongue, which she pierced with the pins that she used for her hair, at the same time uttering many brutal jests.³⁴

Fulvia was not the only sadist in town; Pomponia (the widow of Cicero's brother, Quintus Tullus, and the sister of Atticus) was even more brutal. When Philologus, the freedman who betrayed Cicero, was brought to her, she ordered him to cut off strips of his own flesh, cook them, and then eat them.³⁵ At least Cicero was dead when he was decapitated and had his tongue pricked.

Although women such as Terentia exhibit some similar characteristics, Fulvia was the first real example of the overtly politically ambitious and active Roman woman. In many respects she presaged the powerful women of the Imperial courts and beds of the early Empire, but she was much more complex than that.

Tullia, the last Queen of monarchical Rome (r. c. 535–509 BC) set an extreme precedent for ambitious women who would do anything to achieve their objectives. Livy tells us how Tullia and her elder sister (also Tullia) were married off by their father, Servius Tullius, to the two sons of his predecessor, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus. The sons were Lucius and Arruns. Unfortunately, the marriages were both mismatches; Tullia the Younger had the more fiery temperament, but she was married to Arruns, the calmer of the two sons. Fierce (*ferox*) Tullia resented her new husband's timidity, and inevitably the younger Tullia and Lucius, the other brother, were attracted to each other—'evil fits best with evil' (*'malum malo aptissimum'*).³⁶ The infatuated Tullia repeatedly slurred her sister and Arruns, conspiring with her brother-in-law to murder their siblings and marry. She relentlessly urged Lucius to prove his worth and overthrow Servius—which he set about doing, drumming up support in the Senate. Tullia was desperate to be seen as a kingmaker, in emulation of Tanaquil; Lucius was inspired by her womanly frenzy (*his muliebribus instinctu sfuriis*) and eventually took his seat on the throne. Naturally, Tullia's father, King Servius Tullius, protested. Lucius flung him into the street, where he was murdered by Lucius's thugs—they were goaded by Tullia, the enormity of her crime consistent with her evil character. After hailing her husband as king in the Senate, she returned home in her carriage; on the way she came across her father's corpse lying in the road, and she callously drove over it. Livy called it a crime of ineffable inhumanity (*'foedum inhumanumque scelus'*).³⁷ Tullia was possessed and driven to frenzy by the avenging ghosts of her murdered sister and husband, returning home spattered by the blood of her mutilated father. The street where this shocking event took place was forever called 'Nefarious Street' (*'Vicus Sceleratus'*).

It is not known for certain exactly when Fulvia was born, but it was between 84 and 70 BC. She was probably born in Tusculum, into the Fulvian *gens*—one of Rome’s most distinguished Republican plebeian families. Her mother was Sempronia, the daughter of Sempronius Tuditanus—and sister of the talented Sempronia, who conspired with Catiline and was so reviled by Sallust. Fulvia’s maternal grandparents were Gaius Gracchus and Licinia Crassus, and through Gaius she was a great-great-granddaughter of Scipio Africanus. Her father, M. Atius Balbus, was considered to be a nonentity and a dullard by Cicero (*‘homo Nullo numero ... stuporemque cordis’*), and earned the sobriquet ‘Bambalio’ from the Greek *‘bambalein’* (‘to stammer’) because of his stutter (*haesitantia linguae*).³⁸ Cicero considered her maternal grandfather, Sempronius Tuditanus, to be a madman who was in the habit of throwing his money to the people from the Rostra. Fulvia’s three marriages brought her into the front line of first-century BC Roman politics.

Fulvia deserves to be remembered for more than just her repellent sadism; her achievements are quite remarkable by any standards. However, the primary sources which deal with Fulvia need to be treated with caution. She is particularly prone to biased writing—both in contemporary texts, in the often-invective writings of Cicero, and subsequently in the work of Appian and Dio Cassius, who were both writing some considerable time later. As the wife of Clodius and then of Antony, Fulvia was, by association, a lifelong enemy of Cicero. With Antony, she was also the enemy of Octavian—a master of propaganda who peddled lies about Fulvia to suit his own ends, and in so doing wrote the script for later annalists to replicate.

Fulvia was just the latest in a long line of denigrated Roman women. Even the virtuous and illustrious Cornelia could not escape insinuations of vicarious ambition. It had been rumoured that she plotted (in collusion with her daughter, Sempronia) to murder her son-in-law, Scipio Aemilianus Africanus, in 129 BC, to prevent him revoking the legislation previously passed by her famous sons—the Gracchi. Like Fulvia, Cornelia was not immune from the seemingly ubiquitous sexual slur: writing in the late first century AD (admittedly with a self-serving agenda to spice up his own sex life), Martial lists the paragon of virtue as one of the women who were willing participants in anal intercourse. Pompey’s wife Julia and Brutus’s wife Porcia were also on the list.³⁹

Before Antony, Fulvia had been married to two other relatively powerful men. The first was the notorious Publius Clodius Pulcher, in 62 BC; then, in 51 BC, she married Gaius Scribonius Curio, an ally of Julius Caesar. In his *Life of Antony*, Plutarch describes Fulvia as no wool-spinner, no doer of housework, and in effect no ideal *matrona*. Her marriage to three powerful politicians enabled her to influence (albeit indirectly) the course of Roman politics through the actions of her husbands. Her ambition was to rule over a powerful man—an ambition she achieved as Mark Antony’s third wife. Plutarch continues, ‘she did not think it worth anything to dominate an

ordinary man, but she wanted to rule a ruler and command a commander'. Cleopatra was indebted to Fulvia for teaching Antony to obey a woman, since the Antony she inherited was trained and used to listening to female rule. He calls her 'interfering and bold' ('*polupragmon*' and '*thrasus*'). Appian calls her 'meddlesome' ('*philopragmonas*'). In the AD second century, Florus described what he believed to be the malicious influence she had over Antony (in a masculinised way):

Antony was always evil minded, and his wife Fulvia, wearing the sword of manly military service, goaded him on.

semper alias Antonii pessimum ingenium Fulvia tum gladio cincta virilise militiae uxor agitabat.

This echoes Valerius Maximus's reference to the dagger (*pugio*) Fulvia wore on her *stola*.⁴⁰

Antony must have been impressed and Fulvia's influence must have been significant, because it seems he struck coins bearing her image as a representation of Victory—the first time that Roman coinage had featured a woman. The coins were minted between 43 and 40 BC in Lugdunum and Phrygia, and the portraits show a degree of realism (as opposed to idealism) not previously seen. Another possible first was Antony's supporters renaming the city of Eumenia, in Phrygia, to Fulviana—subsequent mintings of the coins bear this name.

Fulvia and Clodius had two children: a son, also named Publius Clodius Pulcher, and a daughter, Clodia Pulchra, who was briefly married to Octavian in 43 BC. This was a political marriage that was never consummated; Suetonius tells us that Octavian had a quarrel with his mother-in-law and returned the barely-pubescent Clodia to Fulvia, 'untouched, and still a virgin' ('*dimisit intactam adhuc et virginem*'). Octavian believed Fulvia to be intent on gaining absolute power.⁴¹ Clodius was the star of the Bona Dea scandal in 62 BC, and his subsequent trial on charges of *incestum* brought him and Fulvia into conflict with Cicero. Cicero demolished Clodius's alibi; Terentia's suspicions that Claudia (Lesbia), Fulvia's sister-in-law, was attempting an affair with Cicero cannot have helped relations between Fulvia and the Ciceros.

There then followed nine years of marriage, during which Fulvia assumed a bigger role in Clodius's political machinations. The couple were rarely apart, which is not typical when a Roman is ardently pursuing his *cursus honorum*.⁴² Clodius renounced his patrician status so that he could become a tribune of the plebeians; he achieved this in 59 BC, whereupon he embarked upon a legislative programme, the *Leges Clodiae*. These laws endeared him to the people—not least the *lex de capite civis Romani* and the *lex Clodia de exsilio Ciceronis*, which ensured the exile of Cicero for his summary execution of the Catiline conspirators, and also the destruction of the Ciceros' properties. In 57 BC, a motion was passed recalling Cicero; Clodius met this

with violence, attacking the workmen rebuilding Cicero's house, assaulting Cicero himself, and burning down his brother's house. However, Clodius had not reckoned on the gangs of Titus Annius Milo Papianus, who arrested the gladiators Clodius had enlisted to block Cicero's return. After four years of simmering animosity, the two factions finally met on the Appian Way at Bovillae on 18 January 52 BC. In his commentary on Cicero's *Pro Milone*, Asconius tells us how Clodius was speared by Birria, one of Milo's gladiators. The wounded Clodius was taken to a nearby taverna where he was slain by Marcus Saufeius, the leader of Milo's slaves. His corpse was returned to Rome and displayed in the atrium of his house, where a large crowd of plebeians and slaves had gathered. Asconius concludes by saying that 'Fulvia increased their anger at the deed by showing his wounds with effusive lamentations'.⁴³

Fulvia and her mother, Sempronia Tuditani, both attended the trial of Milo in 52 BC. He was convicted of murder, electoral malpractice, and illegal association. Fulvia was called as a witness for the prosecution, after strengthening her case beforehand with a very public and dramatic show of grief. She dragged her husband's corpse through the streets of Rome and into the Curia, where it was burnt as if on a pyre. This action, and the moving testimony she delivered, have been seen as the first demonstrations of Fulvia's singular determination and her political astuteness. The display of the corpse and its public cremation, in such a symbolic place, were calculated to be inflammatory, and to whip up the crowd in support of Clodius and his political heirs. At the very least, anyone witnessing the event would not easily forget it, and it would have won Fulvia a reputation as a woman to be reckoned with. Cicero called Fulvia's sexual conduct into question when he disparagingly remarked that she accompanied Clodius with a retinue of whores and eunuchs. Cicero lost the case, and there began years of mutual hatred.⁴⁴

By the end of 51 BC, Fulvia was married again—this time to Gaius Scribonius Curio.⁴⁵ Like Clodius before him, Curio curried favour with the plebeians, pursuing many of his predecessor's populist policies; in 50 BC he was elected tribune of the plebs. A year later he was dead, killed while fighting bravely for Julius Caesar in North Africa against King Juba I of Numidia, an ally of Pompey. At the second Battle of the River Bagradas, Curio fought to his death rather than fleeing. According to Appian, he was decapitated, and his head presented to Juba.⁴⁶ Curio left behind a widow and a son. Valour apart, he is famous for having built Rome's first amphitheatre, a construction which literally moved the audience—it featured a pivot, which moved the seating mechanically. The amphitheatre was built in honour of his father, Caius Scribonius Curio Burbulieus (d. 53 BC), a celebrated orator whose nickname (Burbulieus, after the equally-celebrated actor) came from the manner in which he moved his body while speaking.

Fulvia's third and most-celebrated marriage was to Mark Antony, in around 47 BC. Cicero malevolently suggests that the couple had had an affair

in 58 BC, and that Fulvia was an adulteress. Cicero's case may be strengthened by the rapidity with which Antony married Fulvia, so soon after divorcing Antonia. Cicero pointedly describes Antony as 'falsely accusing that most virtuous woman of adultery' (*'probri insimulasti pudicissimam feminam'*).⁴⁷

In 47 BC Fulvia gave birth to Marcus Antonius Antyllus. Antony made him his official heir, a decision which no doubt precipitated the execution of Antyllus by Octavian when the boy was seventeen. Iullus Antonius was born in 43 BC; Iullus later embroiled himself in a messy affair with Julia, Octavian's daughter, who was then married to Tiberius. The outcome was Julia's exile in 2 BC; Iullus was sentenced to death for treason, but he fell on his sword before the sentence could be delivered.

Fulvia was still highly eligible, well-connected with the Clodian faction, politically astute, rich, and demonstrably fertile. She provided vital support for and exerted considerable influence on Mark Antony, before and after the assassination of Julius Caesar. She enabled Clodian policies to be extended, harnessing Clodius's gangs to help Antony against Dolabella, and taking an enthusiastically active role in the subsequent bloody proscriptions. She worked with Antony to maximise the advantages of their links with Caesar, procuring his papers and expediting his planned legislation. All this made the couple very rich, and even more powerful. Fulvia confounded Cicero's attempts to have Antony declared an enemy of the state *in absentia* and without trial; Appian records the lengths to which she went to drum up support for her husband after the vote:

Antony's mother, wife, and son ... and other family and friends spent all night at the houses of influential men seeking their support. In the morning they met those going to the senate-house, throwing themselves at their feet wailing and lamenting in mourning clothes, and weeping outside the doors.⁴⁸

The efforts of Fulvia and Julia Caesaris, Antony's mother, went some way to persuading the Senate to debate the matter, along with a speech by L. Calpurnius Piso Caesonius. The senators were no doubt embarrassed by the fact that Antony had not been allowed a trial.

Appian illustrates Fulvia's cruel and greedy behaviour during the dreadful proscriptions of 43 and 42 BC. He tells us how she used them to embezzle the wealth and property of her enemies, or to exact revenge for earlier deeds. An example of this is when she coveted the beautiful house of a neighbour, Caesetius Rufus; Rufus eventually relented, but he was proscribed anyway as punishment for his earlier hesitation. His head was presented to Antony, who passed it on to Fulvia; she had it nailed to the wall of her house as a grisly trophy, instead of on the customary place, the Rostra.⁴⁹ This was a stark warning to anyone thinking of crossing her. Dio confirms Fulvia's brutality, describing how she added even more names to the proscription lists, and recording her greed and the casual way in which the proscriptions were

carried out.⁵⁰

Fulvia was also involved in a demonstration orchestrated by rich Roman women in 42 BC, protesting against the imposition of a wealth tax by the three members of the second triumvirate, Lepidus, Octavian, and Mark Antony. As we have seen, Hortensia saved the day with her impassioned rhetoric; Appian reports that it was so good it could have been delivered by a man.⁵¹ However, Fulvia insulted and outraged the *matronae* by remaining aloof and above such things, despite their entreaties. It is difficult to say whether this further exemplifies Fulvia's greed and arrogance, or whether it was a manifestation of her blind, unbending support for Antony and his policies. The conundrum is complicated by the fact that the proceeds of the tax would have benefitted her personally, through Antony.

Fulvia accompanied her husband to his military headquarters in Brundisium, at a time when women were most unwelcome in military and provincial administrative circles. To illustrate: in the early Empire, Aulus Caecina Severus adopted an extreme view in an AD 21 speech recorded by Tacitus, which contains the arguments which no doubt moulded the regulations relating to accompanied postings. Severus got on with his wife, and they had six children together—however, he had left her at home for the forty years he had been away in the provinces. This was because, in his view, women encouraged extravagance in peacetime and weakness during war, they were feeble and they tired easily, they got angry when left unrestrained, and they schemed and bossed the commanders about. He cited instances of women running patrols and exercises, and how they attracted spivs and embraced extortion.⁵² Prophetically and ironically, Cicero alludes to Fulvia's sadistic tendencies when he calls her '*crudelissima*' ('most cruel'). This was triggered by the fact that she witnessed (and, by implication, enjoyed) Antony's decimation of the crack soldiers of the Martian legion, who had mutinied at Brundisium. According to Cicero, the worst thing of all was that Fulvia was actually present at the atrocity, and even had her face splattered with the blood of the slaughtered soldiers.⁵³

It was not unusual for lawyers to discredit politicians in court by referencing the alleged improper behaviour of their wives or mistresses. In the *Philippics*, Cicero attacks Antony through Fulvia, saying that she was extremely greedy (*avarissima*) and his *dominatrix*. By calling Antony '*Catamitum*', the Latin equivalent of Ganymede, Cicero alluded to Ganymedes's passive sexual relationship with Jupiter. He implies that Fulvia is the dominant Jupiter to Antony's submissive and receptive Ganymede—in short, Fulvia is a *domina*. There would be further references to Antony's alleged submissive and receptive homosexuality in the Perusine Wars. Cicero also called Fulvia's credentials as a *matrona* into question by describing her household as a counting house, in which Fulvia and Antony were selling off 'all of the power of the Roman people' (*totum imperium populi Romani*). Fulvia had swapped her wool-work and her spinning room (*quasilla*) for

commercial activities. Cicero's reference to her as 'the kiss of death' (*fatale*) would have resonated with superstitious Romans, especially as her two previous husbands had died violently.⁵⁴

Cornelius Nepos (c. 110–c. 25 BC) offered a possibly more objective and certainly more sympathetic description of Fulvia in his *Life of Atticus*, a biography of Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero's friend and correspondent. Nepos tells us that she was victimised by Antony's enemies when he was virtually outlawed in 43 BC, after the Battle of Mutina, to the extent that attempts were made to rob Fulvia of all her possessions and to kill her children. Fulvia turned to Atticus for help. She was certainly wealthy, and constantly beset by lawsuits brought by Antony's opponents.⁵⁵

In an attempt to discredit Antony, in the *Philippics*, Cicero relates how besotted he was with Fulvia. In March 45 BC he abandoned his journey to meet Julius Caesar due to a (false) rumour that Caesar was dead; he stopped for the night at Saxa Rubra, on the Flaminian Way, 9 miles from Rome. Legally, Antony could only enter the city during daylight and with an escort. With his identity concealed by a hood, he went to Fulvia's house, pretending to be a messenger bearing a letter from Antony. The letter told how he had ended his current affair with the mime artist Volumnia Cytheris, and described his love for Fulvia—he was now devoted to her only. Unable to contain himself, Antony revealed himself to a very-emotional Fulvia. His ex-mistress, also known as Lycoris (Cicero's mocking *mimula*, 'the little mime'), was the mime whom Cornelius Gallus celebrated in his elegies.⁵⁶ Like Fulvia, in 49 BC Lycoris had accompanied Antony on his travels. It was around this time that Cicero made the injudicious and fatal comment that Antony only married Fulvia for her money: he apparently had debts amounting to some 6 million sesterces.

Some of that wealth may have been accumulated through Fulvia's commercial activity at the time. In 44 BC Cicero states that she was engaged in questionable transactions relating to (amongst others) Antony's restoration of property belonging to the Galatian Deiotarus, which had been confiscated by Julius Caesar. The kingdom of Deiotarus was but one of many territories being bought and sold by Fulvia.⁵⁷

According to Dio, Fulvia was one of the most powerful people in Rome at this time.⁵⁸ She continued to fight Antony's corner, winning support from Caesar's veterans when she toured Italy on Antony's behalf, children in tow; her aim was to dilute the loyalty that Octavian was winning there by gifting promised lands to the veterans.⁵⁹ She also tried to postpone the land settlements until Antony returned from Egypt; she formed an alliance with her brother-in-law, Lucius Antonius, and went public in her opposition to Octavian.⁶⁰ She did all of this for Antony despite the tensions caused by Antony's very-public affair with Cleopatra; tensions which would lead to the Perusine Wars between Octavian and Fulvia. She even went to extraordinary lengths to help raise eight legions for Antony. Appian believes that Fulvia was

a primary cause of the war, driven by her jealousy of Antony and Cleopatra and an attempt to draw back Antony to Italy by raising the temperature between Octavian and Lucius. Appian does, however, mitigate Fulvia's role when he concedes that other causes included the ambition of the commanders and their inability to keep their troops in order.⁶¹

Fulvia and Lucius were certainly a potent force. They were *de facto* consuls for 42 BC, rendering the other official consul, Publius Servilius Isauricus, redundant; however, Lucius was clearly subordinate to Fulvia. She was the wife of Antony, of course, but also mother-in-law to Octavian, Antony's fellow triumvir, through the marriage of Clodia—giving her enormous indirect power and potential influence. This was evident when she effectively side-lined Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, the third member of the Second Triumvirate, denouncing him as lazy. Dio asserts that, at this time, no legislation was passed unless it had the approval of the couple.⁶² An example of their power came in 41 BC when Lucius demanded a triumph for his victories over various Alpine tribes; Fulvia initially refused, and the Senate meekly agreed with her on the grounds that his achievements were insignificant. Fulvia later recanted, and Lucius got his triumph—thus demonstrating to Fulvia, if she needed proof, just how malleable the Senate could be in her hands. In the event, Dio records that Fulvia gained more kudos from the parade than Lucius, despite his ostentatious appearance. Fulvia and Lucius caused additional problems for Octavian in Sicily, where Sextus Pompeius, one of Pompey's sons, blockaded the corn supply to Rome, and in Africa, where Titus Sextius displaced the governor, Fuficius Fango.⁶³

The vexed question of veteran settlement in 41 BC brought Fulvia and Octavian into direct confrontation. Octavian wanted to confiscate the land from the eighteen Italian cities agreed by the triumvirate; as we have noted, Antony was less than keen, so Fulvia attempted to delay a decision until after he returned from Bithynia by touring the troops with her children, urging them to support Antony. Octavian was incensed. 'It was around this time that he unceremoniously returned Clodia, his new, virgin wife, to Fulvia; it is hard to think of a more humiliating insult for a mother and mother-in-law. Virgin or not, Clodia was soiled goods. Fulvia and Lucius adroitly changed their strategy, moving away from support of the veterans (in the hope that Antony would have been able to manage his portion of the settlements), and moving to support the landowners—an extremely powerful and influential action.

This rift with Octavian culminated in the Perusine Wars, which saw Fulvia taking on a uniquely prominent military role. In the conflict (December 41–February 40 BC), Lucius first stationed his army at Praeneste before decamping to Perugia, where he was besieged by Octavian. Due to a shocking breakdown in communications, Antony's legions in Gaul never arrived to reinforce them. However, Fulvia was still at Praeneste, and stepped in—urging Ventidius, Asinius, and Caleneus to repair to Perugia from where they were in Gaul, along with another army she had raised under Plancus.

Velleius Paterculus grudgingly records Fulvia's activities in the Perusine Wars – she was making a thorough nuisance of herself with her man-like activity—‘she who had nothing of the woman in her except her sex was creating general confusion by armed violence.’⁶⁴ There is fascinating archaeological evidence from sling stones excavated at the site of the battle, which show how Octavian's troops tied obscene messages onto the stones they were firing directly at Fulvia. Two were intended for her clitoris, even though she was in Praeneste at the time, with the unmistakable suggestion that she was a lesbian (*tribade*). Fulvia and Lucius were invited to open their bottoms wide to receive the penis-shaped projectiles (*glandes*):

L[ucius]A[ntonius] Calve [et] F[ulvia] culum pan[dite]

Bald Lucius and Fulvia open up your arses

Fulviae [la]ndicam pet[o]

I'm aiming for Fulvia's clitoris

Fulvia and Lucius in turn responded by calling Octavian a cock-sucker and wide-arsed, suggesting that he too was open to passive penetration—the ultimate insult for a free-born man. Their *billets doux* read:

pet[o] Octavia[ni] culum

I'm going for Octavian's arse⁶⁵

What the graffiti clearly demonstrates is that Fulvia's reputation preceded her. Octavian's soldiers obviously knew that she was fully involved in the war, whether she was at Perusia or not.

Dio describes Fulvia's overt militaristic behaviour at Praeneste: she formed a council of senators and *equites*, made plans with them and gave out orders, wore a sword, and even talked with the other ranks—all of which offended Octavian and others greatly.⁶⁶

Velleius's observation that Fulvia was devoid of basic female characteristics, and, in doing what she did as a soldier, behaved as a man would, is significant. When she is defeminised in this way, Fulvia joins a tradition of notable women who were described more as men than as women by elite Roman writers. It seems clear that Roman men had a problem reconciling powerful virtues and qualities in women with their sex, with their femaleness—they thought that these eminent and successful women must really be men. Valerius Maximus reluctantly concedes that women could no longer be kept down in the late Republic. As we have seen, Philo of Alexandria also discourages women from acting obtrusively in public, even when it is to help a husband who is being assaulted; he regarded such behaviour as the exclusive preserve of his fellow men, and insisted that women must not be precipitate but moderate and restrained. Where women do break free of their traditional constrictions, he argued, it is not because they

are women, but rather because they exhibit qualities more appropriate to men. Valerius Maximus cites the case of Maesia Sentias, who conducted her own defence before the praetor Lucius Titius in 77 BC—and, through her legal expertise, secured her own acquittal. Valerius ascribes this success to a masculine spirit, which earned her the patronising sobriquet *Androgyne* (*quam, quia sub specie feminae virilem animum gerebat, Androgynen appellabant*). She is one of three women cited by Valerius who argued cases before the magistrates—for themselves or for others; *matronae* who did not let the fact that they were women, or that they wore the *stola*, deter them from speaking in the forum and the courts (*'condicio naturae et verecundia stolae'*). The other two women cited by Valerius are Afriana and Hotensia.

At around the same time, Sallust attributes male characteristics to Sempronia in order to explain away her obvious courage, talent, and skills. By the end of the first century of the Empire, Juvenal (in his excoriating sixth satire) records his disgust at the vogue amongst women in speaking Greek: 'everything's gone Greek ... they even have sex in Greek (*'omnia Graece ... concumbunt Graece'*). This gives a taste of the anti-woman vitriol to come later in the poem. We have seen that he regards women as litigious, taking over the legal system as defendant or prosecutor, writing the transcripts, and bossing the male lawyers about. He scorns expertise in music and singing, and deplores the women who assume the role of the (male) grammarian, parading their knowledge of Virgil or Homer at dinner parties. 'So great is the force of her verbiage', he writes, that it silences *grammatici, rhetores, causasdici*, and even other women. In short, he argues, the woman who wants to be the pedant (*docta*) and the know-it-all (*facunda*) is a monster (*monstrum*) who should just go away and become a man.⁶⁷ As we have seen, even Lucretia, the paragon of female probity, was defeminised in the writings of Ovid and Valerius Maximus.⁶⁸

Martial preserves for us the lascivious epigram which Octavian reputedly composed for Fulvia. This is another piece of Octavian propaganda, designed to promote his virility and his power as a leader of men:

Because Antony is shagging Glaphyra, Fulvia has decided that my punishment will be that I shag her too. Me fuck Fulvia? What if Manius begged me to bugger him? Would I? I think not, if I had any sense. 'Fuck or fight,' she says. Doesn't she know that my prick is dearer to me than life itself? Let the battle trumpets blow!⁶⁹

Through Martial, Octavian implies that the *casus belli* of the Perusine wars is Fulvia's jealousy at Antony's affair with Glaphyra, and that she is seeking revenge by attempting to sleep with Octavian himself. The epigram is notable in that it is the only source (Cicero's comparatively tepid allegations of adultery apart) which describes Fulvia as sexually depraved and licentious, and as happy to go as far as to wage war if denied sex with Octavian. Perhaps this is just Martial being Martial, selectively obscene, attempting to elevate

the status of his genre by association with Augustus, or indeed simply exploiting the infamy of the pornographic Perusine projectiles.⁷⁰

Glaphyra was a courtesan from Cappadocia who seduced Antony with her beauty, and, no doubt, her assertive personality; in 36 BC she persuaded him to install her first son, Archelaus, as King of Cappadocia. Antony did as instructed and executed the then-king Ariarathes X, replacing him with Archelaus.

After two months, in February 40 BC, the siege of Perugia was raised when Lucius was starved into surrender. Octavian benevolently posted Lucius into obscurity to Spain. Fulvia escaped to Athens with the children; she met with Antony only to find that he was much displeased by her prosecution of the war. Antony returned to Rome, while Fulvia died in exile in Sicily, near Corinth. Fulvia had been used as a scapegoat by the triumvirs, in an attempt to establish common ground between themselves. Antony then married Octavian's sister, Octavia Minor, in a further doomed attempt to cement an alliance. The only positive thing to come out of Fulvia's death was that Octavia adopted her children and looked after them.

Fulvia exerted considerable independence and influence, despite (or as a result of) being married to Antony, one of the most powerful and politically important men of the times. Her previous husbands, Clodius and Curio, were also, by no means, politically insignificant. She was never really an anti-*matrona*, as others have argued; while she was far-removed from the compliant, conflict-averse, docile wives who rarely quarrelled with their husbands, and whom we frequently meet on funerary inscriptions, Fulvia clearly exhibited traits consistent with good matronly behaviour. While there seems little likelihood of her ever working the wool, or evidence of domesticity, she was often found loyally at Clodius's side, and worked tirelessly for Antony and his cause. She strove to preserve the reputations of both Clodius and Antony, against relentless attacks from Cicero in the courts and in his *Philippics*. Her actions following the murder of Clodius exemplify the dichotomy that is Fulvia; in one respect she was the loyal and dedicated wife (the *matrona*), but in another she was obtrusive, truculent, and unpredictable—everything a *matrona* should not be.

It seems she was at pains to be a good mother to her children, taking them with her on the canvassing trip around Italy in support of their father and to diminish Octavian's popularity with the veterans. Perhaps exploitatively, she presented her son Antyllus to the court during the debate over whether Antony should be declared an enemy of the state; her objective could just as easily have been to evoke sympathy as it was to avoid her son being deprived of a father.

Her political acuity, her obvious capability in military matters, and her facility in dictating affairs of state (however directly or indirectly) make her the last of the Republican women of intelligence, power, and influence. As such, she paved the way for the equally powerful, influential, and often

malevolent women of the Empire. Fulvia was quite unique amongst the Roman women of the Republic; she showed sadistic tendencies, and she may have been greedy, but at the same time she shrugged off many of the traditional constraints imposed on her by her gender. She wielded political and military power, worked as an equal (at the very least) with her powerful husbands, and asserted herself publicly and domestically in a tumultuous man's world.

Octavia (69–11 BC)

Octavia the Younger was the sister of Gaius Octavius Thurinus, Octavian, and the fourth wife of Mark Antony. She was the great-grandmother of Caligula and Agrippina the Younger, maternal grandmother of Claudius, and both paternal great-grandmother and maternal great-great grandmother of Nero. She was born in Nola, the daughter of Gaius Octavius (Octavian's father) and Atia Balba Caesonia (85–43 BC), the niece of Julius Caesar. In his *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, Tacitus describes Atia's virtues and the reverence in which she was held:

...you offended her if you swore in her hearing or misbehaved in any way; she was meticulous in her management of the children's duties, their leisure, and their play time.⁷¹

Suetonius is equally reverential in his description of the prodigies which accompanied her pregnancy and the birth of Octavian. Quoting his source as the *Theologumena* by Asclepias of Mendes, he describes how Atia visited the temple of Apollo one night and fell asleep. A serpent came and went; when she woke, she washed as she would after making love with her husband, and discovered an indelible tattoo of a serpent on her body. Thereafter, she avoided the public baths out of embarrassment. When Octavian was born, he was thus considered to be the son of Apollo. During her confinement, Atia dreamed that her internal organs were raised to the stars and spread all over the Earth; Octavian dreamed that the sun rose from between Atia's thighs. Publius Nigidius Figulus, the famous astrologer, announced to the Senate that the ruler of the world had just been born.⁷²

Gaius Octavius died in 59 BC, and Atia's mother later remarried to Lucius Marcius Philippus. He was a caring step-father, raising Octavian, Octavia, and Octavia the Elder (Octavia's step-sister by Gaius and Ancharia, his first wife), and managing their education with Atia. He arranged Octavia's first marriage, which was to the consul and senator Gaius Claudius Marcellus Minor (88–40 BC), an opponent of Julius Caesar; Marcellus was descended from Marcus Claudius Marcellus, the famous general from the Second Punic War. In 54 BC, Octavia's great-uncle, Julius Caesar, agitated for her to divorce Marcellus so that she could marry Pompey, whose wife (Julia Caesaris, Caesar's

daughter by his first wife, Cornelia Cinna) had died in childbirth. Pompey declined the offer, and married Cornelia Metella instead.

Atia was naturally anxious for her son, and tried to persuade him to renounce his status as Julius Caesar's heir. When she died, in 43 BC, Octavian honoured her with a public funeral. Her widower, Philippus, later married one of Atia's sisters.

Octavia had three children from her marriage with Marcellus Minor: two daughters, both named Claudia Marcella (the Marcellae), and a son, Marcus Claudius Marcellus (42–23 BC). Claudia the Elder's first husband was Agrippa, whom she married in 28 BC. Her younger sister was born in 40 BC and was married twice. Gaius Claudius Marcellus Minor died in 40 BC; five months later, Octavia married Mark Antony. Octavia's son, Marcellus, became a favourite of Augustus, and was groomed to succeed him before his untimely death at the age of nineteen. He had married Julia, Augustus's daughter, in 25 BC.

Octavia was Mark Antony's fourth wife. The marriage made Antony and Octavian brothers-in-law, and as such, was one of the most politically sensitive unions in Roman society, where political marriages had almost become *de rigueur* amongst elite families. It was sanctioned by senatorial decree, which was necessary because it took place during the *annus luctus*—the mourning period in which a widow could not remarry—and Octavia's pregnancy with her late husband's third child, Claudia Marcella the Younger. Things seem to have gone well at the start—Antony minted a coin bearing Octavia's portrait, making her the second Roman woman to feature on a coin after Fulvia (her immediate predecessor in Antony's affections). The couple travelled together, Octavia happily residing with her husband in Athens during the winter of 39–38 BC.⁷³ It was there that she was accorded the status of Athena Polias, in the east of the Empire.

Octavia was generous and public-spirited woman. Evidence for this comes in a strange incident in 43 BC when she helped the proscribed Titus Vinius, who had been concealed in a chest by his wife, Tanusia. She hid him in the house of a freedman, claiming that he was dead; Tanusia herself showed courage in risking death for harbouring a proscribed person. Octavia agreed to help, and arranged for Tanusia to deliver the chest to a festival attended by Octavian (without the other triumvirs); here he was sprung from the chest. Octavian was so impressed by the couple's ingenuity and nerve that he pardoned Vinius and Tanusia, and promoted the freedman to the equestrian order—no doubt his sister had a part to play in his decision.⁷⁴

Early signs of Octavia's influence over her brother and husband came in 37 BC, when she was able to use her unique position as sister and wife to good ends. Octavia travelled with Antony to Italy and won over a number of Octavian's allies, notably Maecenas and Agrippa (the equivalent of Octavian's Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary), by pleading the pointlessness of conflict between her two kinsmen. Her intercession led to the

37 BC Treaty of Tarentum and a five-year extension of the Triumvirate. Other triumphs included persuading Antony to increase the size of the fleet he was dispatching to Octavian in the fight against Sextus Pompey, off Sicily, and winning a 1,000-man-strong bodyguard from Octavian, to add to the army he was loaning Antony for the Parthian campaign.⁷⁵ The icing on the cake came when she arranged the betrothal of Octavian's young daughter, Julia, to Mark Antony's son by Fulvia, M. Antonius Antyllus. However, the marriage never took place, as Antyllus was executed after the battle of Actium.

Things were going well. Octavia had established herself as an influential and respected diplomat, astute enough to capitalise on her unique position as wife and sister, to the benefit of Antony, Octavian, and, ultimately, to the benefit of a Rome weary with internecine warring. Antony's head joined hers on the coins, as did Octavian's, and all looked well.

However, this did not take into account Antony's mercurial nature in the treatment of his wives in the context of wider political or personal considerations. Just as he had spurned Fulvia, so he snubbed Octavia; their journey together to the Parthian theatre of war was cut short when Antony sent her back to Rome. The pretext was danger, but Cleopatra was the real reason.⁷⁶ A rejected Octavia devoted herself to the education of her children, and of Antony's children by Fulvia and Cleopatra—Cleopatra Selene, Ptolemy Philadelphus, and Iullus Antonius. Her unhappiness can only have been heightened in 36 BC, when she learned that Antony had admitted to the paternity of Cleopatra's children. However, Octavia remained loyal and won permission from Octavian to take much-needed reinforcements and ordnance to Antony; she got as far as Athens, where letters from her husband told her to go home. Octavia meekly responded by asking what she was supposed to do with the men and supplies.

Antony's insult to Octavia was not lost on Octavian. Antony's treatment of his sister was a growing cause of resentment; he advised Octavia to divorce Antony; she refused and remained the steadfast *matrona*, educating all the children and remaining the dutiful wife. Her main concern was that the growing enmity might lead to another civil war, despite the fragile peace won by the Treaty of Tarentum.⁷⁷ Antony finally divorced Octavia in 32 BC.

Octavian saw that, sooner or later, it would all end in tears. In 36 BC Octavian secured his position by passing a law which gave him tribunician sanctity, even though he was a patrician and not eligible for a plebeian office. This was followed in 35 BC by an even bigger break with constitutional protocol, when he voted the same protection for Livia, his wife, and for Octavia. Statues of the women followed, as did exemption from the legal requirement for the women to have a guardian. We have observed how Octavian had been deeply insulting to Fulvia, and how he used this invective to attack Antony; girding Octavia and Livia with legal sanctity protected him from retaliation by Antony, and reduced his vulnerability to slanderous or libelous attacks on his wife and sister. Octavian had been particularly exposed

by his hasty marriage to the pregnant Livia in 38 BC; Livia's new sanctity closed off this avenue of attack to Antony.

In 31 BC, the forces of Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium; Octavia's ex-husband and his high-profile mistress committed suicide. In 27 BC Octavian established the Principate and became Augustus, ruler of the Roman Empire. Octavia and Livia Drusilla passed seamlessly from being the last famously influential women in the Roman Republic to being the first famously influential women in the Roman Empire. The women closest to the Emperor—his siblings, wife, mother, or mistress—assumed a status one stage above that enjoyed by the wives of mere elite men in the upper echelons of public and political life – just as the Emperor himself was now superior to them in all walks of life.

The reign of Augustus, and the reigns of his Julio-Claudian successors, will reveal two significant social and political developments. Firstly, Imperial women were able to use their elevated status to build up either personal power or to win influence for their sons, notably in the various succession questions. Secondly, they were crucial players in Augustus's programme of moral regeneration, and reform of the laws relating to adultery, marriage, family planning, and sexual conduct.

Octavia's son, Marcellus, was prominent in Augustus's plans for the succession. Apart from the public displays of obvious preferment—for example, the precedence of Marcellus over Tiberius at Augustus's victory parade after Actium—Augustus and Octavia arranged the marriage between Julia and Marcellus in 25 BC. However, the marriage was short-lived; Marcellus died in 23 BC, leaving Octavia a distraught and angry woman. She directed some of her anger at Livia, who had the good fortune to still have her son, Tiberius.⁷⁸ Two years later, she engineered the marriage of Julia to Agrippa, who was married to Octavia's elder daughter Marcella at the time. Agrippa was now Augustus's successor of choice; her action here shows the lengths at which Octavia was prepared to go to help her brother, despite her own personal grief and the wishes of her daughter.

Octavia went on to celebrate her late son's life, living on to enjoy the opening ceremony of the Library of Marcellus and Augustus's completion of the Theatre of Marcellus in 13 BC. When Virgil recited books 2, 4, and 6 of his near-complete *Aeneid* before Augustus and Octavia, Octavia is said to have fainted upon hearing the lines:

Poor boy, if somehow you can burst free of your harsh destiny, you too shall be Marcellus!

heu, miserande puer, si qua fata asperarumpas! tu Marcellus eris

When Octavia eventually came to, she granted 10,000 sesterces to Virgil for each of the lines.⁷⁹

Octavia died in around 11 BC, and was buried in the Mausoleum of

Augustus. The Emperor himself delivered the funeral oration, and he honoured her with the Gate of Octavia and the Porticus Octaviae. Octavia was a competent diplomat, who for many years ensured a degree of non-aggression between her brother and her husband. Despite her loyalty and patience she was badly treated by Mark Antony, who showed little appreciation of her skills during one of the most desperate times in Roman history.

PART TWO

THE EMPIRE

Livia Drusilla (58 BC–AD 29)

Livia Drusilla was born on 30 January 58 BC. She married Octavian, and was the mother of Tiberius, his successor. She was paternal grandmother of the Emperor Claudius, paternal great-grandmother of Caligula, and maternal great-great-grandmother of Nero. Her parents were Marcus Livius Drusus Claudianus and Aufidia; the diminutive name ‘Drusilla’ may suggest that she had an elder sister. Marcus Livius Drusus was her adopted brother. Her father committed suicide after backing Brutus and Cassius at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC. Livia initially married Tiberius Claudius Nero, her cousin, in 43 BC; he had misguidedly sided with Caesar’s assassins after the Ides of March.

Tiberius, Livia’s son, was born in 42 BC. While she was pregnant, Livia divined the sex of her baby by keeping a hen against her breast, passing it to a nurse to maintain warmth whenever necessary. A cockerel was born of the hen, and Livia had Tiberius.¹ Two years later, her husband joined Lucius Antonius (Antony’s brother) and Fulvia at Perusia, in opposition to Octavian. After the fall of Perusia they fled to Naples, where Tiberius Nero unsuccessfully attempted to spark a slave revolt; he later joined Sextus Pompeius (Pompey’s younger son) in Sicily, but he received short shrift here and moved on to Sparta—possibly because he had been proscribed by Octavian at this point.² The inhospitable treatment shown by Sextus Pompeius may be because he had noted Tiberius Nero’s fallibility, and his growing reputation for injudicious, career-limiting decisions—traits which a wily Livia had surely also detected by now. Nevertheless, she stood by him and joined him in exile, where they were well-received by the Spartans.

The couple would soon have to move on, however. One of Livia’s abiding memories from this time would be the forest fire which nearly engulfed her, setting fire to her hair and clothes as she fled Octavian’s soldiers.³ The amnesty agreed by the triumvirs and Sextus Pompeius at the Treaty of Misenum allowed the hapless Tiberius Nero (and his long-suffering wife and child) to return to Rome in mid-39 BC.

Livia obviously benefitted from a good education. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC–AD 50) tells us that she was exceptional because her education lent virility to her powers of reasoning—another good example of how men in the Roman world would ascribe masculine characteristics to women who excelled.⁴ Horace describes Livia as ‘rejoicing in that unique husband of hers’ (*‘unico gaudens ... marito’*), and in so doing gives an instance of how women of even exceptional achievement were defined through the actions or reputations of their husbands or fathers.⁵ One example, though, where a

mother got all the credit—albeit with obvious extenuating circumstances—was Faustus Cornelius Sulla, son of the dictator, who was lionised by his schoolmates because of the reputation of his mother, Caecilia Metella Dalmatica.

Back in Rome, Livia was six months pregnant with her second child by Tiberius Nero: he would be named Nero Claudius Drusus. It was around this time that she would have met the charismatic leader Octavian, still in his early twenties but with obvious ability and promise. Dio writes that they were having an affair in 39 BC, around the time of the party he arranged to celebrate the symbolic shaving of his beard.⁶ They were betrothed in the autumn of 39 BC; Octavian was still married to Scribonia at the time. As we have seen, his previous wife had been Clodia Pulchra—whom he returned to her mother, Fulvia, still the virgin she was the day that he married her. Octavian, reputedly smitten by Livia, divorced Scribonia on the day that she gave birth to their daughter, Julia.⁷ At the beginning of *Life of Galba*, Suetonius describes how the couple tried to mitigate the potential scandal caused by their unseemly haste to wed by peddling the tale that their relationship was sanctioned by a divine omen. They claimed that, while *en route* to her country villa in Veii, an eagle dropped a white hen chick into Livia's lap, holding a sprig of laurel in its mouth. According to Dio, Livia saw significance in this sign; she kept the chick for breeding, and planted the twig in her garden. Remarkably—as white hens were thought to be sterile—the hen gave birth to a number of white chicks. A grove of laurels also sprang up from the twig; subsequently, all *triumphatores* cut laurel from these trees for their triumphal wreaths.⁸ The fable had obvious symbolism; it neatly suggested that the marriage was divinely sanctioned, by portending fertility in Livia and associating the couple with military victory. However, Dio has an alternative, more prosaic explanation: that Livia had the power of the Emperor, rather than a hen, in her lap.⁹

In 40 BC Scribonia had been forced to divorce her second husband, Publius Cornelius Scipio, so that Octavian could marry her; the rationale behind Octavian's marriage to Scribonia was that it would forge a political alliance with Sextus Pompeius. The marriage may have always been doomed, because Octavian was reputedly irritated by Scribonia's constant nagging over his infidelities. In this respect she failed the test of the true *matrona*, who was expected to turn a blind eye to her husband's infelicities. However, she compensated by being a devoted mother and aunt; when Julia, their daughter, was exiled by Augustus, Scribonia volunteered to go with her. In 16 BC she strove in vain to prevent her nephew, Marcus Scribonius Libo, from committing suicide, attempting to persuade him to face his trial for treason instead. She never remarried after her divorce from Octavian. Sources are divided over her: Seneca, echoing Augustus to some degree, calls her a 'serious woman' (*gravis femina*), while Propertius describes her as 'sweet mother Scribonia' in his funeral elegy to Cornelia Scipio.¹⁰

Octavian's hasty marriage to Livia was typical of the swing doors which characterised many political marriages. As we have already noted, amongst elite families marriage was often used to cement political and familial alliances. Although the women were often little more than pawns in these arrangements, they did play a significant role in some highly political and prestigious families. Examples of this include the marriage between Scipio Africanus and Aemilia, the daughter of L. Aemilius Paullus (victor of the third Macedonian War).

By the same token, the desire for successful political advancement was sufficient grounds for casual divorce. We have seen how the orator Hortalsus tried to cement his links with Cato by requesting the hand of Porcia, Cato's daughter, who was already married to Bibulus. Cato refused, but he did agree to divorcing his own pregnant second wife, Marcia, so that Hortensius (whom he also presumably wanted to favour) could marry her instead.¹¹ Julia, Octavian's daughter, was married off three times: to Marcellus, (a mere boy); the son of Octavian's sister Octavia; to Marcus Agrippa, who was already married and had children with one of Marcellus' sisters; and then to Tiberius in 11 BC, whom Octavian (now Augustus) had forced to divorce his pregnant wife.

Nero Claudius Drusus was born in January 38 BC to Livia and Tiberius Claudius Nero. He grew up to become a notably good general, and won considerable success in Germany—penetrating further into the tribal German territories than any other Roman before him. Drusus married Antonia Minor, the daughter of the sister of Mark Antony and Augustus, Octavia Minor; he was famous, unusually perhaps, for his fidelity. Their surviving children were Germanicus, Claudius (the future Emperor), and Livilla; two others died in infancy. Antonia was widowed in 9 BC, when Drusus died—she never remarried, remaining *univira*, and outlived him by nearly fifty years. Drusus died in Germany, after falling under his horse crushing his thigh. He was a popular man: his brother, Tiberius, was so devoted to him that he travelled the 180 miles from Ticinum (Pavia) to his deathbed in just one day and one night. Augustus and Livia met the cortege bearing the body at Ticinum, and escorted it to Rome amidst scenes of public mourning along the route.

Livia's reaction to the tragic death of Drusus was not particularly unusual, exhibiting the natural reaction of a grieving mother bereft of her son. She sensibly took the advice of the philosopher Areius Didymus of Alexandria, who (acting more like a psychotherapist than a philosopher) recommended that she try and accept the situation, talk about it, and not bottle it up. This is significant as it is one of the few instances when we see, or are allowed to see, Livia succumbing to emotion. The fact that Areius knew Livia and Augustus intimately probably tells us that the couple were not averse to confiding in those they trusted; Areius was very close to Augustus – he was a firm friend (*assiduus comes*) – and knew how both his and Livia's inner minds worked, (*secretiores animorum vestrorum motus*). The *Consolatio ad Liviam*, a long

elegiac poem, would have provided little solace to the distraught Livia.

Octavian and Livia married, rather hurriedly, on 17 January 39 BC; Livia was nineteen. Livia's former husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero, gave her away 'just like a father would', according to Dio.¹² Tacitus, probably relying on vindictive correspondence from the stylus of Mark Antony, claims that Livia was forcibly abducted ('*abducta Neroni uxor*' and '*aufert marito*'), but this hardly chimes with a wedding ceremony in which the former husband gives the bride away. Indeed, Tiberius Claudius was most likely acting with characteristic sycophancy; Cicero describes him as ever anxious to please, while Velleius and Dio note that he was obsequious. The omens at the time of the marriage were not good, however. The ancient hut of Romulus burnt to the ground, the statue of Virtus fell flat on its face, and Magna Mater was rumoured to be angry with the Romans, causing panic amongst the people.

From the beginning of the fifty-two years of marriage that followed, Livia acted in consort with her husband, advising him on policy decisions while running her own affairs, and agenda. At the same time, however, she was very much the model *matrona*, dressing modestly in the *stola* (long dress), working the wool, wearing little jewelry, and having her hair done conservatively, often in the *nodus* or 'club' style, with its old Republican overtones (as championed by Octavia, her sister-in-law). She attended to her relatively modest household on the Palatine, striving for a child, an heir for her husband.

The only result of their efforts was a miscarriage, but the marriage survived, although it would not have been an unusual elite practice to divorce in these circumstances. Livia was the epitome of the traditional *materfamilias*, running a traditional *familia*. Livia's modesty would draw comparison with Cornelia, whose real jewels were her children. Her simple attire, modest jewelry, and general lack of showiness set her in stark contrast not only to contemporary fashion amongst privileged women, but also, more crucially, to Cleopatra—the bejeweled queen whom Lucan would later describe as being freighted with the booty of the Red Sea, so loathed by Octavian. Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (9.119-21) provides a vivid comparison with Cleopatra when he tells us how Livia was presented with a phenomenally large crystal—she generously and astutely had it displayed on the Capitol, so that the Roman people could enjoy it. This was a far cry from Cleopatra's after-dinner party trick of dissolving a large, hugely expensive pearl in vinegar.

From the beginning, Octavian was probably attracted to what Tacitus describes as Livia's affability (*comitas*); he and Velleius Patriculus describe Livia's beauty (*forma*), and Tacitus adds that Octavian was motivated by passion and 'by desire for her body' ('*cupidine formae*').¹³ In time, this settled down into what we might assume to be love and affection; even Suetonius concedes that Augustus' love for Livia was 'special and enduring' ('*unice et perseveranter*'). There is little doubt that she was a powerful force. Scribonia complains of her 'no little power' ('*nimiam potentiam*')—power in the

political rather than the erotic sense—and Tacitus hints at coquettishness when he reports that she was not an unwilling player in Octavian's seduction ('*incertum an invitam*'). Seneca calls her *maxima femina*.¹⁴ Politically, she had a fine family ancestry, allowing Octavian to forge links with the prominent *gens Claudia*.

In 36 BC Octavian was voted the sacrosanctity hitherto exclusively reserved for tribunes (*tribunicia potestas*), and, more significantly, the following year saw Livia and Octavia receive the same honour. Other precedents included statues erected in their honour and the freedom to conduct their personal business transactions without the involvement of a guardian, a privilege that was solely the preserve of the Vestals until now. On 16 January 27 BC the Senate voted to give Octavian the titles of *Augustus* and *Princeps*. Octavian was now Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome, and Livia Drusilla was right by his side.¹⁵

A three-year tour of the east began in 22 BC, when Augustus and Livia stopped first in Sicily. They then took in Sparta, which they rewarded with the island of Cythera in gratitude for the hospitality the Spartans had shown Livia and Tiberius Nero during their flight through Greece in 40 and 39 BC.¹⁶ Athens, however, fared worse due to their support of Mark Antony; they lost Aegina and Eretria, and the statue of Athena on the Acropolis swivelled round and spat blood. Nevertheless, in a bid to mend fences, the Athenians voted to give Livia and Octavia divine honours.¹⁷ Livia and Octavian wintered on Samos—an island with particular significance to Livia, whose family had long been patrons of the Samians. Augustus rewarded them by restoring the massive statues of Heracles and Athena to their rightful places in the temple of Hera – they had been removed by Antony as a gift to Cleopatra.¹⁸ It seems likely that Livia first met Salome and Herod the Great of Judaea when they were in Syria. In Armenia, Tiberius installed a Roman ally on the throne, and Augustus enacted diplomatic initiatives with Rome's long-standing enemies, the Parthians, even succeeding in retrieving the standards ignominiously lost at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC.

The couple returned to Samos to pass the winter of 20–19 BC. As we have seen, Augustus finally relented to Livia's entreaties to grant the Samians their freedom. The couple were the centre of attention, with delegations arriving from India and a visit from the Queen of Ethiopia. The Indians brought gifts of tigers with them—never before seen by the Romans—large snakes, tortoises, a huge partridge, and an armless man witnessed by Strabo.¹⁹ They returned to Rome in the summer of 19 BC, via Athens. Here, one of the Indians, Zarmarus, was initiated into the Eleusynian Mysteries at nearby Eleusis. Eager to experience the newly-acquired promise of a happy afterlife, he hurled himself into the fire, wearing only his loincloth.²⁰ Augustus and Livia met Virgil, who was about to begin a grand tour of his own, but was persuaded by Augustus to return to Rome with the Imperial party. Unfortunately, the poet fell ill and died at Brundisium.²¹ At the end of 16 BC

it seems likely that Livia accompanied her husband on a trip to Gaul and Spain.²²

Marriage was very much a pragmatic affair; its objective was to produce legitimate children, to maintain the birth rate, to ensure the survival of a particular family, to supply the Roman army, bureaucracy, land, and legislature with a source of recruits, and to cement political alliances. This is how it was for all elite Romans, but the need for the Emperor to produce a male heir was, of course, paramount. Soranus, the Greek physician who was practising in Rome in around AD 100, neatly and with no compromise sums up the social and biological imperative: 'women are married for the sake of bearing children and heirs, and not for pleasure and enjoyment'.²³ The ability to raise a family was so vital that Spurius Carvilius Ruga successfully sued for divorce (reputedly Rome's first) in 231 BC because his wife, Turia, was unable to bear children and therefore give him an heir—this was the whole point of their marriage, according to Spurius. The woman's infertility (or alleged infertility) became valid grounds for divorce. After realising that she was unable to bear her husband children, Turia was prepared not only to divorce him but also to help him find another, more fertile, wife. She would then act as a sister or mother-in-law in the new *ménage à trois*. Turia's husband was furious at her suggestion and preferred to stay married, even though it would mean the end of his family line.²⁴ Sulla divorced his allegedly barren wife, Cloelia.

Moral and social reform was high on Augustus' legislative agenda. He tried to inculcate the belief that his own domestic arrangements and *familia* provided the blueprint for the best Roman way of life. In the earlier days of the Republic, Lucretia had demonstrated how spinning and weaving were crucial skills in Roman households at all levels of society, and they became the badge of the good mother and wife. Augustus himself supposedly wore home-spun clothes and promoted the traditional skill of weaving, boasting that all the women in the Augustus household could spin and work the wool. Livia exemplified this; she dressed modestly, without ostentation: her domestic staff comprised five patchers, two supervisors, six women in charge of clothing, one cloak-maker, one tailor, and two fullers. She was not the only wool-working *materfamilias*; the Statilii Tauri family had eight spinners, one supervisor, four patchers, four weavers, two dyers, and four fullers on their books. It would be intriguing to know what the wayward Julia thought of this decidedly unfashionable way of life—and of the resulting attire.

Augustus' sartorial simplicity was but one item in a programme of domestic frugality. He was at pains to show the Imperial household and domestic lifestyle as typically Roman, modest, and conservative. At the house, dinner parties were sociable and entertaining enough while not being crassly sumptuous. The Imperial house was comfortable but not palatial, marble-free and mosaic-free; the furniture, according to Suetonius, was ordinary, and Augustus' bed was rudimentary. The family's holidays were

what we would now call budget, and relatively local, and Augustus' diet was frugal and simple.²⁵ All of this would have influenced Livia and made it easier for her to assume the role of the relatively inconspicuous, modest, and financially prudent *matrona*, as the housekeeper and the woolworker. Added to this is the fact that Livia had seen a bit of life before becoming the Emperor's wife—unlike Julia and the Agrippinas, who knew little else other than Imperial indulgence and privilege.

Livia's fidelity to Augustus, her comparative *univira*-ness, likewise gave some much-needed credence and substance to Augustus' attempts at social reform. It was a bid to reverse the lessening frequency of marriage, the increasing levels of adultery, and the falling birth rate. Her probity (*pudicitia*) was above question. Even the hostile Tacitus never suggests *stuprum* on Livia's part; indeed, her morality was consistent with the moral rectitude of the old days (*priscum ad morem*).

As far as Augustus was concerned, Romans needed to be reminded what marriage was for. In his eyes it was indubitably for producing children; the marriage that ended in the death of one of the partners, rather than in divorce, had seemingly become something of a rarity. The *Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus* of 18 BC prohibited get-out marriages such as those between senators and their near relatives or freedwomen. It banned marriage to convicted adulteresses, those in a dubious profession, and fallen and stigmatised women—the *probosae* (actors, dancers, prostitutes, and convicted women). It rewarded fertile women with favourable inheritance rights and relaxed the requirement to have a guardian; it rewarded fertile men with fast-track political advancement.

Under the *Lex Julia de Adulteriis Coercendis*, passed in the same year, adultery was criminalised with banishment as punishment. A new court (the *quaestio perpetua de adulteriis*) was set up to try adultery cases in public, an initiative which abolished the privacy hitherto afforded by the family courts (in which the woman was tried by her relatives). If found guilty, the man and woman were dispatched to different islands (*dummodo in diversas insulas relegentur*), and some of their property was seized. A woman lost half of her dowry and a third of her property, and the man lost half of his property. The real winner, however, was often the ubiquitous informer (the *delator*), who stood to gain a share of the confiscated property, with the rest going to the treasury. Augustus' law-makers seem not to have anticipated this bounty for the *delator*, often based on unreliable evidence and predicated on an upsurge in reported 'crimes'. Other penalties increased the offender's infamy, such as the ending of the adulterer's right to act as a witness in court. Women were prohibited from marrying freeborn Romans; they became infamous (*probosae*), and were prevented from wearing the *stola* (the dress of the *matrona*). They were then stigmatised by being made to wear the toga, as worn by men and prostitutes; the *stola* was almost sacrosanct, untouchable, whereas the toga was not. Valerius Maximus tells us how, in court, a woman's

accuser could not touch the woman so that her *stola* remained ‘undefiled by another’s hand’ (*‘inviolata manus alienae tactu’*).²⁶ Seduction also became a criminal offence, defined as when a man seduces a virgin or a respectable widow without the use of force.

Adultery had always been a private affair, a civil matter, usually dealt with within the family under the *paterfamilias*, but it was now open to the full glare of public scrutiny. A cuckolded husband now had to divorce his wife within sixty days; failure to do so might result in prosecution for complicity, and possible punishment as an adulterer himself. The adulterous daughter of Augustus, Julia, was a notable convict under this law herself; she was exiled to Pandateria, modern-day Ventotene, in the Tyrrhennian Sea.

Predictably, Augustus’ legislation was generally very unpopular, and caused public demonstrations. The laws amounted to what we would today call the meddlings of a nanny state. Consequently, they were somewhat diluted by the *Lex Papia Poppaea* in AD 9—named after the consuls of that year, who, incidentally, were both childless and unmarried. It was, of course, all blamed on women. In *Noctes Atticae*, Aulus Gellius summed up the public (or, rather, the male) mood when he quotes Augustus’ speech in the Senate in 17 BC. Playing to the gallery, Augustus grudgingly declaims:

...if we could survive without a wife, citizens of Rome, all of us would do without that nuisance, but since nature has decreed that we neither manage comfortably without them, nor live in any way without them, we must plan for our lasting preservation rather than our temporary pleasure.

The same sigh of resignation can be heard coming from Varro:

...a husband must either put a stop to his wife’s faults or else he must put up with them. In the first case he makes his wife a more attractive woman, in the second he makes himself a better man.

Iconographic visual promotion for the moral crusade came in 9 BC, when the Ara Pacis was completed. It was erected in thanks for Augustus’ campaigns in Gaul and Spain, and it depicts the Emperor and Livia with various children—symbolising their role-model status as a good family. Augustus is made to resemble Aeneas, while Livia is reminiscent of a goddess; she is depicted on the east face, with her hair unusually worn in a much looser style than the characteristic *nodus*.

Livia’s cultivation of the *matrona* ideal had some impact. In AD 8 the poet Ovid was relegated to Tomis, on the Black Sea coast, for reasons which remain a mystery; ‘a poem and a blunder’ (*‘carmen et error’*) is all we really know. As part of his desperate, indiscrete, and sycophantic campaign to secure a return to Rome, a number of his poems cite Livia as a possible ally. She is an Empress (*femina princeps*). In *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, written to his wife, he refers to Livia’s unparalleled Vestal virtue (*pudicarum Vesta*

matrum), her Venusian beauty, and her Junoan character—she is described as a veritable goddess and, in an oblique compliment to Augustus, herself worthy of the bed of a god.²⁷ In his *Tristia*, Ovid describes his loyal and devoted third wife; she is the model of a good wife (*exemplum coniugis bonae*), and she would hold first place amongst the sacred heroines of mythology. Somewhat disingenuously and obsequiously, Ovid writes that his wife would be an equal to the first lady, Livia—if he was allowed to compare the great with the small. In the *Fasti*, he associates Livia with Venus and Aeneas by using the word *genetrix*, redolent of Venus.

Livia, then, was in some respects the epitome of a good Roman *matrona*, but at the same time she enjoyed an independence which left her largely free from the power wielded by her husband—the man with the *patria potestas*. She demonstrated that she could be tolerant, even-handed, and open-minded. Dio records how she pardoned a number of men who were sentenced to death for inadvertently appearing naked before her; she explained that, to a modest and chaste *matrona*, naked men were no different from statues—and just as unattractive. When asked how she managed to have such an influence over Augustus, she pointed to her own scrupulous chastity, happily doing what pleased him, keeping out of his business affairs, and conniving at his extramarital affairs. She was therefore an accommodating wife (an *uxor facilis*), in the words of Tacitus; another hallmark of the male ideal of the *matrona*. In around AD 5 she persuaded Augustus to spare Gnaeus Cornelius Cinna Magnus and Aemilia Lepida, who were on trial for plotting against him. In doing so, she exhibited a rare sense of mature political acuity, arguing that revenge would serve considerably less purpose than rehabilitation, and that the absence of clemency in previous cases (she provides a list) had only led to subsequent plots. She self-deprecatingly excuses all her enlightened thinking as ‘*muliebrum consilium*’—‘a woman’s advice’.²⁸

Dio neatly sums it all up: he asks Augustus what more he could want than a wife who is faithful, looks after the home, raises her children, makes him happy, nurses him when he is ill, shares his good luck and his misfortune, and restrains youthful passion while militating against the ravages of old age. On the other hand, a letter from Mark Antony to Octavian (reported by Suetonius) would suggest that Livia had much to put up with. Antony asks Octavian why he was so exercised by his affair with Cleopatra, when Octavian had presumably slept with Tertullia, Terentilla, Rufilla, Salvia Titisenia, and the rest of them.²⁹ Moreover, according to Suetonius, Livia was present at the notorious and scandalous Feast of the Divine Twelve, and was apparently involved in procuring virgins for her husband to deflower, well into his old age.³⁰

Augustus made it his business to restore the increasingly moribund religious fabric of Rome, as manifested in his refurbishment or rebuilding of eighty-two shrines and temples. Livia was similarly occupied, restoring the shrines of Plebeian and Patrician Chastity, centres of moral rectitude which

were exclusively female. She followed this by financing work on the temples of Fortuna Muliebris and Bona Dea Subsaxena—again, both very closely associated with women. Ovid celebrates Livia's good works in state religion in his *Fasti*. Here, as in her projection of a public persona redolent of the virtues of a good *matrona*, she reflects and personifies aspects of Augustan domestic policy relating to the restoration of the ailing state religion.

Livia's influence was not restricted to home affairs. Salome, the Judaeen princess and sister of Herod the Great, died in AD 10, generously leaving Livia the cities of Iamneia, Phasaelis (famous for its lucrative date palms), and Archelais in her will; Salome had already gifted Livia five million silver drachmae. The bequest and the gift probably derived from the enduring, long-term friendship built up between Livia, Salome, Augustus, and Herod after their meeting in Syria in 20 BC. We have seen that in the same year, Livia and Augustus wintered on Samos where she urged Augustus to grant the islanders their freedom, which he initially refused; Livia doggedly persisted, until her husband eventually relented. At around the same time, the twelve cities of the Ionian League received the right to mint their own coins. Livia benefitted from their gratitude when coins featuring Augustus and Livia were circulated by the city of Teos—remarkable not just for their uniqueness, but also because they promoted a prematurely divine status for Livia. In around 9 BC, Dynamis (the estranged wife of the Roman-backed King of Pontus, Polemo I) dedicated temples to Augustus and Livia as a friend of Rome (*philoromaïos*), in the town of Phanagoria. Dynamis described Livia as 'a doer of good deeds' (*eurgetis*). A year or so later, Polemo married Pythodoris; Pythodoris became Queen of Pontus after Polemo's death in battle, and dedicated a statue to Livia in Hermonassa as another *eurgetis*. Pythodoris' daughter, Antonia Tryphaena, was a priestess of the cult of Livia and a benefactor of the city of Cyzicus, where she set up a statue to Livia in the Temple of Athena—as a bringer of victory (*Nikephoros*). This is probably a mark of thanks for Livia giving help to Cyzicus during the siege in the Mithridatic War and, like others around Pontus, indicates the gratitude of the women sponsors who benefitted from Livia's support.

We have Livia to thank for some of the architecture in Ancient Rome. She was one of a number of influential women who sponsored public buildings around the Roman Empire. Polla, the sister of Marcus Agrippa, built a racecourse, and began the building of the Porticus Vipsaniae on the Campus Martius—later completed by Augustus, and home of Agrippa's map of the world.³¹ An inscription dating from around AD 6 was found in 1995 by the English archaeologist Michael Ballance, in Akmonēia (modern-day Ahat, in central Turkey). The inscription is now lost, but luckily Ballance photographed it. It reads:

...the women, both Greek and Roman, honoured Tatia daughter of Menokritos ... the High Priestess who acted as their benefactress under all

circumstances, in recognition of her virtue.

This is a unique example of women taking the initiative in, and the responsibility for, an act of civic administration within local government—voting to finance and raise the statue of one of their own.³²

Eumachia was a priestess (*sacerdos publica*) who had married into one of the leading Pompeiian families after inheriting property from her father, a successful brick manufacturer. She was a patroness of a guild of fullers—a prestigious position in one of the most important local industries. During the reign of Tiberius, Eumachia gifted the fullers a large building for their head office, dedicated to Augusta and Pietas; it survives today, as the Building of Eumachia.³³ The timing of the gift may not have been accidental, as it coincided with her son's campaign for public office. Another Pompeiian lady, Julia Felix, owned a local estate which comprised baths, shops with rooms above them, and flats on the second floor—all available for rent on a five-year lease. In AD 43, Junia Theodora is fondly commended by the citizens of Corinth for her largesse.³⁴ Likewise, Flavia Publicia Nicomachis was commended for her total virtue, as benefactress and founder of the city of Phocaea in the second century AD.³⁵ Modia Quinta, a priestess in Africa Proconsularis, was honoured with a statue to recognise her provision of marble patio in the portico, ceilings and columns, and an aqueduct.³⁶ Octavia was a sponsor of Vitruvius, who dedicated his *De Architectura* to her.

Livia was presumably involved in the design of the Porticus Liviae, given to the nation by Augustus, and of the Theatre of Marcellus. According to Ovid's *Fasti*, Livia certainly paid for the temple (*aedes*) within the Porticus. Strabo also credits Livia for some of the new buildings springing up in Rome. She was probably involved in the *macellum Liviae*, a market complex, and in the restoration of Verginia's shrine of *Pudicitia Plebeia*. In the *Fasti*, Ovid tells us that Livia restored the Temple of Bona Dea Subsaxana, traditionally dedicated by a Vestal Virgin—both associate Livia closely with chastity (*pudicitia*).³⁷ Livia also restored the Temple of Fortuna Muliebris, on the Via Latina.

Her patronage extended to include literary festivals—for example at Corinth, Chalcis, Mouseia, and Thespieae in Boeotia. The city of Augusta, in Cilicia Pedias, was named after her, as was Liviopolis on the Black Sea coast. Throughout Europe, divination came thick and fast for Livia. Octavia, Julia, and Antonia were all honoured, setting the stage for subsequent Emperor and empress cults. In around 20 BC, the divine Julia appears on a coin from Thessalonica, and she is also celebrated on an Athenian coin with Julia. At a Corinthian festival, the poetry of Flaccus Syracusius was dedicated to the goddess Julia Augusta, and on Lesbos she had her own sanctuary as Livia Providentia. A huge bust of Livia has been found at Leptis Magna, and it is associated with the Temple of Augustus and Roma there; a similarly colossal statue, over 3 metres in height, was discovered in the theatre. Livia enjoys

numerous associations with goddesses—notably Vesta, Juno and Hera, and Ceres.

As time passed, and as the prospect of producing an heir to Augustus gradually receded, Livia's attitudes and behaviour began to be influenced by the intoxicating mix of her devotion to Tiberius and Drusus, her desire to see them do well, and the vicarious power that brought. At one extreme, historians insinuate that Livia's hand is evident in the deaths of all the possible aspirants to Augustus' title. Conversely, she may have been innocent on all counts, and the eventual accession of Tiberius in AD 14 could have simply been the culmination of a series of coincidences. Years later Livia's grandson Caligula was sceptical, although he begrudgingly admired her, calling her *Ulixes stolatus*—Odysseus in a *stola*, alluding to the mental agility and duplicity that she shared with Odysseus (and characteristic of a man). However, in a letter he wrote to the Senate, he also described her as being of low birth.

Julia, the daughter of Augustus, grew up in the family household, seemingly receiving a formal education and an upbringing that was strictly controlled.³⁸ In 25 BC, at the age of fourteen, she was married to her cousin, Marcus Claudius Marcellus, but the marriage was childless. According to Dio, Velleius Paterculus, and Tacitus, Marcellus (42–23 BC) was a popular rising star, destined to succeed his uncle.³⁹ Augustus began paving the way, facilitating his journey along the *cursus honorum* and dedicating games and a theatre to him. However, Marcellus died in suspicious circumstances at Baiae in 23 BC, aged nineteen. Dio refers to rumours which implicated Livia, while at the same time conceding that natural causes (perhaps a fever or a virus) could just as easily have been to blame.⁴⁰

In 21 BC Julia married Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, the close friend and ally of Augustus, some twenty-five years older than Julia. Despite Julia's serial adultery with Sempronius Gracchus, Tacitus' 'persistent adulterer' (*pervicax adulter*), and rumours of a relationship with her stepbrother Tiberius, the couple had five children between 20 BC and 12 BC. They were Gaius Caesar, Vipsania Julia (Julia the Younger), Lucius Caesar, Vipsania Agrippina (Agrippina the Elder, mother of Caligula), and Agrippa Postumus.⁴¹ In 17 BC, Augustus adopted Lucius and Gaius as prospective heirs after Agrippa, who was now his immediate successor. He took on their education, and adopted Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa Postumus in AD 4.

Agrippa died suddenly in Campania in March 12 BC, while Julia was pregnant with Agrippa Postumus. He was buried in the Mausoleum of Augustus, with great ceremony. After the birth, and with Julia still in mourning, Augustus betrothed her to Tiberius, her stepbrother, and had her marry him.⁴² To enable this to happen, Tiberius firstly had to divorce Vipsania Agrippina—to whom he was happily married, and who was pregnant with their second child. Vipsania had been betrothed to Tiberius at birth, when Tiberius was ten years old; they had married in 19 BC. The divorce took place

in 11 BC, ‘not’, according to Suetonius in his life of Tiberius, ‘without considerable anguish’ on Tiberius’ part (*‘non sine magno angore animi’*), and was a constant source of regret to him. Tiberius and Julia had a son, but he died in infancy. It seems that over time Tiberius came to despise Julia, while still loving Vispania; by 6 BC the couple had separated.⁴³ Octavia died in 11 BC, leaving Livia with Julia as the only contender for first lady of Rome.

We can only speculate as to whether Livia had a direct influence on the actions of Augustus here. It seems probable that Tiberius was seen as something of a safe bet; he was certainly held in some esteem by both Augustus and Livia at this point. Tiberius was ‘most agreeable’ (*‘iucundissime’*), and Augustus bewailed, ‘I long for my Tiberius’ (*‘Tiberium meum desidero’*).⁴⁴

The untimely death of Drusus in 9 BC brought a number of honours for the grieving Livia. Statues of her were erected, she was allowed the benefits of the law of bearing three children, the *ius trium liberorum* (she had been released from the control of any guardian in 35 BC), and the Porticus Liviae was probably erected soon afterwards, in 7 BC. Significantly, Ovid tells us how a shrine (*aedes*) to Concordia was dedicated in the portico. Concordia symbolised marital harmony; the dedication took place on the same day as the female-orientated festivals of Fortuna and Matralia.⁴⁵

Tiberius’ decision to leave the turbulence of Rome for a less-stressful life came as a snub to Augustus and as a shock to Livia. Her entreaties and attempts to stop him only resulted in Tiberius going on a rather-petulant hunger strike, after which he was allowed to leave and start his seven-year sojourn in Rhodes. He was free of Rome, free of Augustus, and free of his mother. On his journey, Tiberius paused only to buy a statue of Vesta from the Parians, which he sent to Livia to grace the Temple of Concord.⁴⁶

It seems that both Livia and Augustus were punctilious note-takers and record-keepers. In complicated issues, Augustus would draft notes to read out to Livia to ensure he got his facts and details right— perhaps an indication that he was forever being corrected by his wife. She archived these notes and his letters, so as to be able to access them when required—a decidedly hurtful letter about Tiberius which was to surface later being a case in point.

Lucius Caesar died at Massilia in February AD 2, on his way to a command in Spain. More significantly for Livia and Tiberius, Gaius Caesar died two years later in Lycia, after being wounded in Artagira, in Armenia. He had foolishly accepted an invitation to parley with Addon, one of the rebels he had gone to subdue. In breach of the agreed ceasefire, a single arrow struck him, causing him psychological as well as physical problems. He resigned his command and set off back to Rome, but he never arrived; he died in February, during a stop-over in Limyra, Lycia. The finger of suspicion was again pointed at Livia; Tacitus suggests that she was implicated.⁴⁷

It is impossible to say with any certainty how far Livia was actually behind these deaths. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that she was

only too ready to influence Augustus towards Tiberius as far as she could, with Tiberius' interests at heart and a desire for the vicarious power she would continue to wield if he succeeded her husband. It is highly unlikely that this ambition extended to poisoning by proxy. Nevertheless, her championing of Tiberius had almost certainly manifested itself some years earlier, when Tiberius—now disparagingly known back in Rome as 'the exile' (*exsul*)—began to feel increasingly vulnerable in Rhodes and sought permission to return to Rome. He may have been jolted by the report that a guest at one of Gaius Caesar's dinner parties had, according to Suetonius, said that the host only needed to give the word and he would go to Rhodes and return with Tiberius' head. In any event, Augustus, still smarting from the insulting *exsul*, initially refused Tiberius' request; Tiberius redoubled his efforts in AD 2 and, probably helped by his mother, gained permission to return 'with vehement entreaties' (*impensissimus precibus*). Unfortunately for Tiberius, however, there was a condition: Tiberius had to continue his exile from public office, and to downsize from his palatial house on the Carinae for a life of enforced *otium*.⁴⁸ Of course, the deaths of Lucius and Gaius Caesar changed all that.

The premature demise of his heirs prompted Augustus to reinstate and adopt his stepson, Tiberius, and his remaining grandson, Postumus Agrippa, as new co-heirs. In AD 9 Augustus banished Postumus to Planasia, a small island off Tuscany near Elba, for reasons unknown to us; according to Tacitus, however, Livia had encouraged Augustus in this. Thus the road was left clear for Tiberius to succeed the Emperor; around the time of Augustus' death, Postumus was murdered by his guards.⁴⁹ Livia was again a suspect, as indeed were Augustus and Tiberius, encouraged by unsubstantiated rumour-mongering later reported by Tacitus and Suetonius regarding possible reconciliations between Postumus and Augustus. The ever-popular Germanicus, Livia's grandson, had also been a candidate for succession; however, Livia dissuaded Augustus from adopting him with her chthonic spells (*occultis artibus*) and her entreaties—more than a suggestion of witchcraft. For Livia, Tiberius came first; Germanicus could wait until later.⁵⁰ Augustus insisted that Tiberius adopt Germanicus in AD 4.

In August AD 14, Tiberius departed Rome for a posting in Illyricum, joined by Augustus and Livia for the first leg of the trip. The omens were decidedly bad, with comets, thunderbolts, hooting owls on the Senate, and—most graphically—a lunatic sitting in the chair of Julius Caesar, wearing a crown. All hell had broken loose. Augustus fell ill; initially he had diarrhea, but despite a rest at his villa on Capri, his illness persisted while they were in the Gulf of Puteoli and Naples. The party split up at Beneventum, with Tiberius heading for Illyricum and Augustus and Livia for Nola. It was at Nola that Augustus died, on 19 August, aged seventy-five. According to the sources, his last words were 'Livia, never forget our marriage, farewell' (*Livia, nostri coniugii memor vive, ac vale*). Some allege that he died after eating figs that Livia had laced with poison, an uncomfortable allusion to

Cleopatra's suicide.⁵¹

Tiberius was now Emperor. For Livia, it was a smooth transition from wife of the Emperor to mother of the Emperor—in theory, at least. At the funeral, an eagle was released to symbolise the spirit of Augustus ascending up to the heavens, but someone called Numerius Attius could do better; he swore that he actually saw Augustus himself ascending: Livia rewarded his perspicacity with one million sesterces. Such was the value of Augustus' apotheosis. She maintained a devoted vigil for five full days before gathering up her husband's ashes and depositing them in the mausoleum.⁵²

Livia obviously appreciated the implications of this massive change in circumstances. With Augustus she had enjoyed the status of a confidante, giving advice when requested and providing a sounding board for policy and opinion. While she claims she never interfered in Augustus' business, she was always there in the background, ready to offer help which Augustus would sometimes take on board and sometimes reject. She knew how far she could go, and she never overstepped that mark. With Tiberius, things were very different; she became the over-solicitous mother, interfering in matters of state at will, dominating him, and assuming the role of a co-regent. In short, she engaged in public affairs to a degree hitherto impossible and unknown for a Roman woman. Perhaps she was trying to compensate for her son's obvious lack of enthusiasm for the job, and his aloofness; perhaps she felt a need to provide a degree of continuity within the Augustan regime; or perhaps she was satisfying a desire for more personal power, enticed by the seductive taste she enjoyed when working with her husband.

Livia did very well out of her late husband's will. She received one third of his estate, amounting to an unprecedented 50 million sesterces, while Tiberius inherited the rest. The size of this inheritance meant that the Senate was obliged to waive the *Lex Voconia*, which restricted the size of women's inheritances. Livia was adopted into the Julian *gens* and took the honorific name of Julia Augusta, a great, unprecedented honour which elevated Livia above the status merely of the Emperor's widow. The seeds of this had probably been sown when she was described as a *Romana princeps* in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, delivered at the funeral of Drusus in 9 BC; at the same time, she became the legal daughter of Augustus. Augustus was immortalised, and Livia was made priestess, with the reflected glory that came with the appointment. Velleius Paterculus (3, 2, 75) described her as 'a woman peerless amongst women ... more like a god than a mortal'. Her power and status increased apace; in AD 20 speaking ill of her became a treasonable offence, and in AD 24 Tiberius granted her the right to sit with the sacred and august Vestal Virgins in the theatre.

Livia seems to have been a devoted grandmother, especially in relation to the children of Germanicus and Agrippina—two of them, Julia Livia and Livia Drusilla, were named after her. She looked after Caligula and his sisters when they lost their father and their mother was detained. She dedicated a

statue, in the form of Cupid, to one of their sons who had died in infancy, and it was placed in the Temple of Venus on the Capitol. Germanicus, at least at one point, was loved in equal measure by both Augustus and Livia. Even Claudius, who was easily ridiculed, was looked after by his grandmother. Through various letters, Suetonius shows how Livia agonised over how she would accommodate him in the official Imperial organisation while the Piso decree recognised the *disciplina* (tuition) he received through Livia; she was clearly at pains to give him a chance to get on in life. She would have been involved in the selection of Claudius's first wife, Plautia Urgulanilla, granddaughter of Livia's friend Urgulania.

Antonia, Livia's daughter-in-law, obviously enjoyed her company. After the death of Drusus, she chose to remain a *univira* and live close to Livia. Livia kept Julia the Younger going during her long exile (hypocritically, according to Tacitus), with financial and probably emotional support as well. Julia's daughter, Agrippina the Elder, was shielded from Sejanus by Livia.

It may not have been all good news for Livia, however. We have seen how Augustus deposited his will and other documents with the Vestals, including that bombastic and highly selective account of his achievements—the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Other, less-glowing aspects of his career were missing from this, including his bloody proscriptions, and Livia. This may indicate a level of ingratitude on the part of Augustus, but at the same time Livia may not have expected to be included, given what we know about the place and expectations of women—even Imperial women—in a man's world. Nevertheless, given what we know about the woman herself, it is hard to believe that she would not have been affronted by her absence from the text.

Tiberius turned to Livia for political and diplomatic help, at least in the early days, as evidenced by the vexed question of Archelaus III of Cappadocia. He had snubbed Tiberius, despite receiving earlier favours, and was now suspected of plotting a rebellion. Tiberius asked Livia to write to Archelaus and entice him to Rome, promising him a fair trial if the king was contrite. Her 'coaxing and promising' (*blanditias atque promissa*) did the trick, and Archelaus arrived in Rome to appear before the Senate on what appeared to be trumped-up charges. Archelaus was very frail and ill; he did not survive the ordeal, and died in Rome.⁵³

Livia was one of Rome's first female celebrities, appearing on statuary and provincial coinage from 16 BC. More iconography followed, including a series of coins minted with her portrait—depicting and celebrating not only her changing fashions in hairstyle over the years, but also her evolving role as an ideal *matrona*, mother, consort, and dowager. By the end of her life, Livia had received virtual apotheosis on coinage, as represented by her association with *Pietas* and *Concordia*; she paved the way for the numismatic propaganda enjoyed by subsequent empresses. Claudius, her grandson, deified her in AD 42; he produced coins bearing the inscription *DIVA AVGVSTA*, with the reverse showing a seated Livia holding a torch in her left hand and wheat in

her right—both indicative of Ceres.

As time wore on, relations between the Imperial mother and son started to cool. The Senate wanted to bestow upon Livia the unprecedented title of ‘Mother of the Fatherland’ (*‘Mater Patriae’*) to mirror Augustus’ title, *Pater Patriae*. Tiberius vetoed this, refusing to accept the title of *Pater Patriae* himself. Suetonius tells us how Tiberius had been particularly incensed when his mother arranged a senatorial decree allowing ‘Son of Livia’ (in addition to ‘Son of Augustus’) to feature on his official documents. He believed that it was her intention to become joint ruler with him, and avoided contact with her whenever possible. Dio records that Tiberius once prevented Livia from hosting a mixed dinner party, and entertained the men himself while she was deputed to looking after the women. Tiberius was also upset when he heard about Livia’s part in helping the fire brigade put out a fire near the Temple of Vesta.⁵⁴ It seems that Livia was cultivating her own clique of friends, even using her power to protect them and accord them unprecedented privileges. To Dio, she was sole ruler (*autarchousa*); she received senators at her home, and recorded their visits in state documents. Official letters were sent and received, bearing not just Tiberius’ name but hers as well.

Two of Livia’s privileged friends were Plautia Urgulania and Munatia Plancina. To Tacitus, Urgulania thought herself outside the law, and treated it with cavalier disrespect. An example of this was when Lucius Calpurnius Piso sued Urgulania for an unpaid debt; she ignored his summons, and persuaded Livia to issue a statement against Piso, forcing him to come to her instead of to the court. Livia sided with her friend and involved Tiberius, who diplomatically parried Livia’s complaint that Urgulania had been insulted by Piso’s persistence. She claimed that her sovereign power (*maiestas*) had been compromised; Livia possessed no *maiestas* of course, it being the preserve of the Emperor. She settled out of court, on Urgulania’s behalf, and the matter was closed.

Tacitus also tells us how a praetor was once dispatched to the home of Urgulania to cross-examine her—an unprecedented event, according to Tacitus, as every Roman citizen (including the Vestal Virgins) was required to attend the courts in person. A similar instance of arrogance followed in AD 24, when Urgulania was called as a witness for the trial of her grandson, Plautius Silvanus. He was charged with the murder of his wife, Apronia, by throwing her out of an upstairs window. Tiberius, who was trying the case, investigated the crime scene and discovered signs of a violent disturbance; Silvanus claimed that he had been asleep throughout the event, and that Apronia must have committed suicide by jumping out of the window. Urgulania sent Silvanus a dagger so that he could save himself from trial and avoid bringing shame and dishonour to the family if convicted of uxoricide. Not long afterwards, Silvanus’ first wife, Numantina, was acquitted of a charge that she had driven him insane by spells and potions—witchcraft.⁵⁵ The shockwaves caused by the murder were still being felt in the reign of

Claudius, who divorced Plautia Urgulanilla out of fear that her family was implicated.

More Livian meddling had been evident earlier, in the case of Munatia Plancina—wife of the governor of Syria, Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, a wild and dissentious man according to Tacitus. The couple were accused of poisoning Germanicus, the nephew and adopted son of Tiberius. It seems Livia was backing Plancina as part of her jealous campaign against Agrippina, Germanicus' wife.⁵⁶ In AD 18, Piso and Plancina had a confrontation with Germanicus and Agrippina in Syria; Livia had asked Plancina to keep Agrippina under control, to prevent a repeat of the Rhine bridge episode—when Agrippina had assumed the role of a military commander. Nevertheless, Plancina took this as an opportunity for her to involve herself in military matters, as Agrippina had done before her; she took part in infantry and cavalry exercises, and ignored the things that were appropriate for a woman (*decora feminis*). According to Tacitus, Plancina was in the habit of insulting Germanicus and his wife, prompted by Livia.

Germanicus died in October AD 19, and Piso and his wife were prime suspects—although Tacitus does concede that others believed the Pisones to be innocent. The death of Germanicus evidently gave Munatia Plancina some considerable pleasure; she had been in mourning for her sister at the time, but after Germanicus died she swapped her mourning clothes for something a bit brighter.⁵⁷ Plancina and Piso returned to Rome the following year, to answer questions about the mysterious death of Germanicus. If they were guilty, there was little sign of remorse—the Piso house was decorated, and their return was celebrated with a dinner party. Nevertheless, it was all over for Piso; Plancina was allowed to deliver her own defence at the door of the Senate, a virtually unprecedented act for a woman. This was very rarely allowed to happen, with the most notorious example being the case of Annia Rufilla in AD 21, who yelled abuse at Gaius Cestius Gaullus from the doorway; he had convicted her of fraud, but her impunity was guaranteed because she had a portrait of Tiberius in her possession. Annia was, nevertheless, jailed for her troubles.⁵⁸ Livia defended Plancina, exerting pressure on Tiberius to propose an acquittal; but this had the effect of raising the question of how far Livia herself was involved in the murder. The Senate reluctantly agreed to the acquittal, despite weighty evidence to the contrary, as a favour to Livia for her previously sterling record in matters of state. Plancina distanced herself from Piso, who then committed suicide.⁵⁹ A senatorial resolution, the *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre*, confirms that Plancina owed her acquittal to Tiberius, under pressure from Livia. The *Senatus Consultum* and the *Tabula Siarensis* (found in Spain and dating from the time of the court case) predictably praise the positive work Livia did for all Romans, but adds the double-edged caveat and back-handed compliment that while she could have had considerable influence over the Senate, she chose to wield it sparingly. After Livia's death, Plancina lost her immunity and protection; in AD 33

Tiberius renewed the charge; Plancina committed suicide in anticipation of the judgement.⁶⁰ It is impossible to say how far Livia and Tiberius were implicated in the death of Germanicus; Suetonius believed they were and Dio implies as much, but Tacitus is non-committal.

Two of Livia's other friends were both called Marcia. The first was an informer for Livia; her most significant act, and her last, was to apprise Livia of the resurgent relationship between Augustus and Agrippa Postumus—a threat to the succession of Tiberius. Marcia's information was obtained through her husband and friend of the Emperor, Fabius Maximus, who it seems was in cahoots with Agrippa. For one reason or another, Marcia committed suicide—it is thought she was stricken by grave reservations about her actions. The other Marcia is famous for the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, written in her honour by Seneca around AD 40, in consolation for the death of Metilius—one of four of her children, two of whom died young. This Marcia was the daughter of the historian Cremutius Cordus, author of a history of a 'Civil War' down to 16 BC. His praise for the assassins of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius, earned him the wrath of Sejanus, who charged him with treason in AD 25; Cremutius took his own life. His writings were burnt, but not before Marcia bravely had copies made, which were eventually republished during Caligula's reign. Seneca tells of the friendship between Livia and Marcia, an *amicitia* (friendship) which may well have resulted in the priesthood accorded to Metilius.⁶¹

Tacitus saw the notable and ill-advised absence of Livia and Tiberius from the funeral of Germanicus as the point at which the mantle of 'state *matrona*' passed from Livia to Agrippina, the grieving widow. To Tacitus, Livia's support of Plancina was pivotal; it turned all decent-minded people against her. Livia must have been appalled to hear Agrippina being hailed as 'the glory of her country' (*'decus patriae'*), 'a unique exemplar of the good-old-days' (*'unicum antiquitatis specimen'*), and 'the last member of the line of Augustus'.⁶²

The circumstances surrounding the death of Germanicus remain a mystery. Some suspected black magic—a suspicion confirmed when workmen searching his quarters made a sinister discovery under the floor and between the walls. They found human remains, spells (*defixiones*) inscribed with Germanicus' name, bloody ashes, and other magical paraphernalia associated with death. In a related story, the Syrian witch Martina—famous for her her potions, *veneficia*, and a close friend of Plancina's—was summoned to Rome by those preparing charges against Piso and Plancina. Before she could get there, however, she was found dead at Brundisium. There was no sign of suicide; it seems she was killed by her own poison, knotted in her hair.⁶³

The *Tabula Siarensis* has further significance because it reveals that Livia, Agrippina the Elder, and the sister of Germanicus, Livilla, were given the responsibility of drawing up the shortlist of honors to be voted to Germanicus.

While Tiberius would have the final word on this, it is an important sign of the growing power of early Imperial women. One of the statues that was agreed featured Germanicus atop his triumphal arch, along with eleven members of his family including his mother, wife, and daughters—only Livia and Octavia, wife and sister of Augustus, had hitherto enjoyed this privilege within the city walls of Rome.

Tiberius was further irritated when Livia reinstated the morning Imperial *salutatio*, previously abandoned by the increasingly infirm Augustus, where the Roman public could lobby the senators on issues of concern; this was a kind of Roman politician's constituency surgery. Livia had no official place here, nor a remit to perform this very male and privileged function.

In AD 22, Livia independently dedicated a statue to Augustus, inscribing her own name before that of Tiberius—thereby deeply insulting him again. By AD 26 Tiberius had had enough of his meddlesome, bullying mother, and of all the other shenanigans that characterised Roman political life and Imperial domestic discord. He retired to the splendid isolation of Capri.⁶⁴ Tacitus believes that the mother and son were still getting on well in AD 22, or else they concealed their mutual animosity very well. Dio believes that Tiberius despised her, even at the time of his accession.⁶⁵ Suetonius records the quarrels between mother and son; one notable spat occurred when Livia urged Tiberius to include the name of one of her favourites in his lists of jurors. Tiberius agreed to this, but only if he could add a footnote which said the entry was forced on him by his mother. At this, an outraged Livia showed her son letters she had received from Augustus, in which his stepfather hurtfully called him miserable and obstinate.

The historians lose interest in Livia as she neared the end of her long life, preferring instead to report the activities (salacious and otherwise) of Tiberius, and the political intrigues of the time. What we do know is that by now Livia was an extremely wealthy woman, cash-rich and the owner of a lucrative portfolio of properties and land. Apart from Prima Porta, her villa near Rome, and the Judaeen cities inherited from Salome, she owned real estate on Lipari, Capri, Tusculum, Thyateira, Lydia, and Egypt. She also had stakes in papyrus production, viniculture, olive presses, grain and vegetable cultivation, brickworks in Campania, a copper mine in Gaul, the Livianum, and apartments in Rome.

Fascinating details of Livia's household were discovered in 1726, when the *Monumentum Liviae* was excavated. It revealed that she had a *dispensator* who looked after the finances and the outgoings, treasurers (*arcarii*), bookkeepers (*tabularii*), and a *custos rationis patrimonii*, who took care of Augustus' inheritance. We have seen the extent of her wool-working staff, her wool-weighers, *lanipendi*, *sarcinatores*, and her *sarcinatrices*—her sewing men and her seamstresses. As to be expected, she also had dressers (*ornatrices*), maids who looked after her wardrobe (*ad vestem*), maids who dressed her on ceremonial occasions (*ab ornamentis*, with a specialist

exclusively for her attire as a priestess of Augustus), a shoemaker (*calciator*), a masseuse (*unctrix*), footmen (*pedisequi*), a furniture-polisher (*colorator*), an art-curator (*tabulis*), a goldsmith and a gilder (*aurifex* and *inaurator*), and a pearl-setter (*margaritarius*). On the healthcare side, she had a medical manager (*supra medios*); readings were read by a *lector*.⁶⁶ The usual *deliciae*—naked, young, pretty boys kept for entertainment—included Gaius Julius Prosopas, whom Livia shared with Livilla until his death at the age of nine. Dio tells of an amusing incident where Livia had a conversation with a *delicia* at a banquet soon after she was engaged to Octavian. They were loquacious, cheeky young boys, who were expected to be rude, risqué, and impertinent; Seneca informs us that they had special training in abuse and impudence, and were always regarded as witty but never gave offence (*‘nec has contumelias vocamus, sed argutias’*). This particular *delicia* told Livia, who was reclining with Octavian, that she was in the wrong place, as her husband, Tiberius Nero, was somewhere else in the room.⁶⁷

Livia competed with Julia, Augustus’ granddaughter, for the honour of owning the smallest dwarf; Julia had the shortest male at just over 2 feet, while Livia had the shortest female. She was just as superstitious as any other Roman woman. We have seen how she dealt with the sky-falling white chick and the laurel, and the gender-defining hen’s egg; another instance involved Scribonius, an eminent astrologer, telling her that Tiberius would rule, but not like a monarch (*sed sine regio insigni*). This was before the birth of the Principate, and before she had even met Octavian. Letters she received from Augustus in Greek suggest that she was familiar with the language. Philo of Alexandria has Herod Agrippa say that Livia was noted for her mental agility—he adds that this is a quality rare in women.⁶⁸

Her longevity may be accounted for, in part, by her daily quaff of Pucinum—a vintage wine of some note and, according to Pliny, celebrated for its medicinal qualities.⁶⁹ She was also an acolyte of the controversial physician Asclepiades of Bithynia (c. 120 BC– c. 70 BC), who arrived in Rome, renowned for his good bedside manner. According to Celsus, he practised medicine ‘safely, swiftly, and with a smile’ (*‘tuto, celerites ac iucunde’*). He had allegedly raised a man from the dead; he repudiated much of the commonly-accepted Hippocratic teachings, spurning surgery and pharmacology—which he described as a preamble to death. Asclepiades (and presumably Livia) advocated a good diet, exercise, massage, bathing, and rocking beds. He said that if he ever fell ill he would retire from medicine; he succumbed neither to illness nor retirement, but died instead when he fell off a ladder. His recommendation of the moderate consumption of wine as a medicine earned him the sobriquet ‘Oinodotes’—‘the wine-giver’. He was admired by Cicero and Lucretius, but was later considered a charlatan by Galen.⁷⁰ Livia’s predilection for healthy living and natural herbal remedies survives in two of her recipes, which were still in use by the fourth century AD by Marcellus Empiricus of Bordeaux—*magister officium* for Theodosius

and author of *De Medicamentis Liber*. One of the recipes was for a sore throat, and comprised opium, split alum, saffron, cinnamon, coriander, and myrrh; the other was for anxiety and chills, and contained marjoram, rosemary, olive oil, and Falernian wine. Livia was an avid gardener, with impressive displays at her Primaporta villa; she developed her own species of fig, the *Lavinia*, praised by Columella and Athenaeus. She also originated an Egyptian papyrus, the superior grade of which was the *Augustus*—followed by the *Livia*. She cultivated wine by the amphora.⁷¹

In AD 22, the eighty-year-old Livia became ill. Tiberius returned to Rome to be with her; some sort of filial gratitude for her eventual recovery may be implicit in the granting of the Vestal Virgin privileges noted above and the dedication to her of a statue of Equestrian Fortuna. Her recovery was publicly marked by thanksgivings (*supplicia*) and games on a grand scale. The solemnity of the situation was underscored by the involvement of the four priestly colleges—the pontifices, the augurs, the quindecimviri, and the septemviri. However, when Livia fell ill and died in AD 29, Tiberius remained aloof on Capri, using the excuse of work-related pressure, and sent Caligula to deliver the funeral oration. Livia's corpse remained unburied for a number of days; putrefaction forced an unsentimental Tiberius to order her burial.

Tiberius denied her any divine honours, saying that this was what she wanted. Tiberius was mean-spirited to say the least; the generous honours voted to her by the Senate after her death were vetoed and the execution of her will was annulled, while the funeral was a decidedly modest affair. The year-long period of mourning was cut short and the unprecedented honorific arch never saw the light of day. The five million sesterces she planned to leave to Galba was reduced to 500,000 sesterces, due to some spurious confusion over the zeros. Tiberius seems to have been out of step with the popular mood: Velleius described Livia as 'a woman who in every respect was more like a goddess than a human' (*'per omnia deis quam hominibus similiora femina'*).⁷² It was not until AD 42 that all her honours were restored by Claudius and she was deified with the name *Diva Augusta*; in the celebrations, an elephant-drawn chariot carried her image to all the public events. A statue was erected in the Temple of Augustus, to accompany that of her husband, races were held in her honour, Vestals made sacrifices to her, and women could henceforth invoke her name in oaths, including the marriage vow. In AD 410, during the Sack of Rome, her ashes were scattered to the four winds when the tomb of Augustus was pillaged.

Livia was something of an enigma, a living paradox. Publicly (at least), she embodied *pudicitia* and modestly played the role of the ideal Roman *matrona*, but privately she was involved in some hands-on policy making on behalf of the world's biggest superpower. This was a massive shift from the virtual power wielded by women of the Republic; by and large they had remained excluded from public office, taking a back seat, but with Livia the

centre of power had moved from the Senate house to the Imperial residence—well within the reach of Imperial mothers and wives.

To Horace, Livia was a *univira*—or as close as one can get to it after a previous marriage and an affair with the future-Emperor of Rome. To Tacitus, she was a woman who exhibited *virtus*, that quality of masculinity with its overtones of strength, bravery, and virtue—qualities shared by Roman men and woman alike, but strongly rooted in manliness rather than femininity. To Ovid, she was the personification of the perfect wife and *princeps femina*; for Seneca, she was ‘a woman who was most careful about protecting her reputation’ (*feminam opinionis suae custodem diligentissimam*). In the view of Tacitus, she exceeded ancient standards; her private life was conducted with old-fashioned strictness, sanctity and propriety (*sanctitate domus priscum ad morem, comis ultra quam antiquis feminis probatum*). She was a compliant (*facilis*) wife, but an oppressive (*impotens*) mother, who could deal with her husband’s guile and her son’s simulation (*‘cum artibus mariti, simulatione filii bene composita’*).⁷³ Dio records how Augustus was blissfully unaware of the control Livia exerted over him; when some senators asked him how he controlled Livia (with more than a touch of irony), his response clearly showed that he believed he was the dominant partner in the marriage. Velleius, in an unusual flash of balanced assessment, makes the point that anyone (by and large) touched by Livia usually came off to the good.⁷⁴

However, as a mother she was meddlesome and a bully. She knew where to draw the line with Augustus, and not to overstep it. With Tiberius, on the other hand, she frequently overstepped the mark, taking her own power, influence, and authority to extremes never before attempted by a Roman woman. She was anxious for power (*anxiam potentiae*), a despotic mother (*impotentia matris*). The author of the *Consolatio ad Liviam* was possibly too close to events to appreciate just how much Livia intruded in public and political affairs during the reign of Tiberius. She may have been largely discreet and discrete under Augustus, and ‘she did not stray into the exclusively male world of the Campus Martius or the Forum, establishing her household on the right side of what is allowed’ (*‘nec vires errasse tuas campove forove quamque licet citra constituisse domum’*)—the same cannot be said for her actions under Tiberius.

She did not deliver the heir that her husband and Rome needed, but her marriage lasted fifty-two years despite this. Horace, Ovid, Tacitus, and the other historians are of course writing to their own agenda, and they each have personal axes to grind, but the inescapable truth they concede about Livia Drusilla is that she was the most influential woman Rome had ever seen. She was at once the perfect *matrona* while at the same time helped to govern the Roman Empire, in consort with her husband and in competition with her son.

Antonia Minor (Augusta) (36 BC–AD 37)

Livia Drusilla was a woman of influence of the Republic and of the Empire. Her niece, Antonia Augusta, is the first woman whose sphere of active influence was exclusively during the Principate. She was born on 31 January 36 BC in Rome, the younger of the two daughters of Mark Antony and Octavia.¹ She was the niece of Augustus, sister-in-law of Tiberius, paternal grandmother of Caligula and Agrippina the Younger, mother of Claudius, and both maternal great-grandmother and paternal great-aunt of Nero.

Antonia never really knew her father; her parents divorced in 32 BC, and her father committed suicide in 30 BC, just before Cleopatra took her own life. After the divorce, Octavia moved in with her sister (also Antonia) to live with Livia and Augustus. Antonia's education would have been enriched by the tutors Octavia is known to have engaged for them. Antonia was born wealthy, inheriting possessions in Italy, Greece, and Egypt.²

Antonia married Nero Claudius Drusus in around 17 BC, who was the second son of Livia Drusilla and the brother of Tiberius. Three of their children survived childbirth—Germanicus, born in 15 BC, Livilla, born in around AD 11, and the future-Emperor Claudius, born in 10 BC in Lugdunum (Lyons).³ Drusus pursued an active military life, serving with Augustus in Gaul and Spain in 14 BC, Germany in 13 BC, and Gaul the following year. Here, he established the Altar of Rome and Augustus at Lugdunum; he was the first Roman general to sail on the North Sea, and he built the canal linking the Rhine with the Yssel—the Fossae Drusinae. It may be that Antonia accompanied him on more of these postings than just Lugdunum; she was with him in Gaul, and an inscription suggesting her presence dating from 12 BC has been found at Ulia (Montilla), in Spain.⁴ Drusus died in 9 BC, after falling from a horse while returning to Germany; he was consul for that year.⁵ The *Consolatio ad Liviam*, attributed to Ovid, describes Antonia's grief. She elected to remain a *univira*, despite pressure to remarry from Augustus and the legal requirements of his *Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus*. She spent her widowhood in the same house and room that she had shared with Drusus—in the home of Livia and Augustus.⁶ Her resolve to maintain her *univira* status is significant: it marked Antonia out as a paradigm of the ideal *matrona*, following in the tradition of Lucretia and Cornelia. Normal practice would have been to remarry; indeed, some (Seneca, for example) thought it strange that she remained *vidua*, young and presumably still fertile as she was.

Like Cornelia, in widowhood Antonia devoted time to providing a sound education for her children—the boys at least—another badge of the good

matrona. We know from Suetonius that Germanicus was a learned and competent orator, and that he was familiar with Greek comedy. He also produced the *Aratea*, an astronomical treatise based on the *Phaenomena* of Aratus. Meanwhile, Claudius was a notable historian and student of Greek culture, who introduced three new letters into the Roman alphabet; his teachers included Livy and Sulpicius Flavius.⁷

Antonia did not live a life of domesticity, however; the fact that she had three children exempted her from the constraints of guardianship. The *ius liberorum* permitted her to act as a free and independent agent, no doubt allowing her the opportunity to manage her overseas properties and their lucrative commodities. Another striking similarity between Antonia's and Cornelia's widowhood are the salons Antonia hosted for a plethora of influential (and often regal) foreign visitors. Agrippa I from Judea, Antiochus IV from Commagene (Armenia), Pythodorus II from Thrace, Tigranes V from Armenia, Ptolemy from Mauretania, and Darius from Parthia all beat a path to her door. Indeed, Antonia was something of an ambassador for Rome, cultivating friendships and alliances, and (no doubt) receiving priceless intelligence about the dynasties around the Mediterranean and on Rome's borders. She had other influence amongst the powerful and rich—this included Alexander the Alabarch (Tiberius Julius Alexander Maior, brother of Philo the philosopher), a prominent Alexandrian Jew who became one of Antonia's administrators in Egypt. As an indicator of his prodigious wealth, he plated the nine massive gates at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem with silver and gold. Antonia was also a friend of Lucius Vitellius, a consul and father of Aulus Vitellius, the future Emperor. Vitellius had a long and illustrious *cursus honorum* under both Caligula and Claudius, including three consulships. Apart from introducing a number of new strains of fig to Rome, he was regarded by Caligula as god; Claudius left him in charge of Rome in AD 43, when he went to conquer Britannia.

Antonia's overseas estates and properties would have been managed for her by agents such as Alexander. He and his staff would have dealt with the mundanities that have appeared on excavated papyri; for example, Dionysus complained that a neighbour's sheep damaged one of Antonia's grain stores, and thirty-five-year-old Aunes, the man with the scar on his left thumb, reported the loss of his red-skinned pig on 14 November 36 BC.

Antonia suffered a second bereavement in AD 19, when Germanicus was allegedly poisoned by Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso and Munatia Plancina. The death caused widespread and universal mourning at home and abroad—an indication of the popularity of Germanicus and his family. The fact that Antonia did not attend the funeral (she may have been forbidden to attend by Livia and Tiberius, who also stayed away) perhaps suggests that the Imperial couple were somewhat nervous about Antonia's obvious popularity with the Roman people.⁸

Livia's death in AD 29 effectively promoted Antonia to *materfamilias* of

the Imperial household; she was able to take responsibility for Caligula and Claudius, hitherto under the control of Livia.⁹

In AD 31, Antonia's perspicacity saved the lives of Tiberius and Caligula. She discovered how her daughter Livilla, whom Tacitus tells us had grown into a beautiful woman, was involved in the plot with Sejanus and many others to assassinate her brother-in-law and grandson and seize the throne.¹⁰ Antonia revealed the plot to Tiberius, locked Livilla in a room, and starved her to death. Sejanus was executed, and his body was thrown down the Scala Gemoniae into the Forum—where it suffered three days of post-mortem abuse by the mob, before being dumped in the Tiber.¹¹ This was not the first time that Sejanus and Livilla had worked together, this time with fatal consequences for Antonia's family; in AD 23, Livilla had seemingly poisoned her husband, Nero Claudius Drusus—Tiberius' son by his first wife, Vipsania Agrippina. Drusus was, of course, a potential successor to Tiberius. The plot was exposed by evidence from Apicata, the former wife of Sejanus, just before she committed suicide.¹² To Tacitus, Livilla was morally bankrupt and capable of anything; despite being close to the seat of power, she gave up everything for her provincial adulterer.

When Caligula became Emperor in AD 37, he elevated Antonia to the status held by Livia Drusilla after the death of Augustus. He gave her all the honours that Livia had enjoyed, including the privileges of the Vestal Virgins and the title of *Augusta*; however, Antonia rejected this. As with Tiberius and Livia, Antonia's relationship with Caligula soon deteriorated; Antonia knew what atrocities Caligula was capable of, witnessing first-hand his juvenile incestuous assaults on Drusilla, his sister.¹³

Antonia was understandably incensed when Caligula had his cousin Gemellus (Antonia's grandson) beheaded, removing him as a threat to his throne. She subsequently committed suicide, weary of Caligula's unpredictable and psychopathic behaviour; she was seventy-two years old. Suetonius hints that Caligula may have poisoned her.¹⁴ Her son, Claudius, voted her the title of *Augusta* when he succeeded Caligula in AD 41, and made her birthday a public holiday with games and public sacrifices.

We know little about Antonia's personal life. She was reputedly beautiful, and celebrated for her virtue and devotion in remaining *univira*; she was revered as a manifestation of Venus Genetrix on Earth.¹⁵ Pliny may have been suggesting that her manners were refined when he records that she never spat; we know that she generously loaned money to Agrippa when he was in financial straits, visiting him when he was jailed by Tiberius.¹⁶ ¹⁷ When Claudius was writing his early history of Rome, Antonia astutely advised him not to reveal what he knew about the civil wars and the early days of the Empire.¹⁸ Her reluctance to expectorate apart, these were all the actions of an independent woman of sense and influence, and of some compassion.

Antonia's house, within the palace of Augustus on the Palatine, included the usual range of slaves, freedmen, and freedwomen to be found in any elite

household; many of them reveal themselves to us from Livia's tomb, the *Monumentum Liviae*. Pamphilia was her dresser (*ornatrix*), Athenais mended for her (*sarcinatrix*), Eros carried her litter around the city (*lecticarius*), Liarus served her drinks, and Quintia and Tertia were her singers. Caenis was her secretary—the lady who acted as messenger when Antonia sent the crucial letter to Tiberius, in Capri, warning him about the Sejanus conspiracy. The *domus* also included physicians—not least, Galen tells us, Florus, who prescribed a complicated eye ointment to treat eyes singed by previous, less efficacious lotions. Antonia was not immune from displays of excessive luxury: Pliny the Elder describes how her lamprey, complete with golden earrings, was passed down to Claudius, and then to Agrippina (mother of Nero) after Antonia's death.¹⁹ The fishpond involved was located in Antonia's opulent summer house in Bauli (modern-day Bacoli), south of the resort of Baiae.

However, there is another side to Antonia. For whatever reason—frustration, disappointment, or embarrassment—she was, to modern sensitivities, hurtful to Claudius, her son, who suffered from what was probably cerebral palsy. She called him a monster, a half-complete creation, describing others she considered stupid to be dafter than Claudius. Augustus and Livia were particularly embarrassed by Claudius, as shown by a letter from Augustus to Livia in which the Emperor agonises over the extent to which he should allow Claudius to officiate at public events—and be seen, indeed gawped at, in the Imperial box with him. He urges Livia to show Antonia the letter, indicating that she too was exercised by this issue. To a Roman, and particularly elite and successful Romans, *virtus* was a hallmark of *Romanitas*. A deficiency of *virtus* was seen as weakness, a lack of manliness, and disability of any kind (physical or mental) of course precluded *virtus*—they were mutually exclusive. Antonia may even have farmed Claudius out to Salome I as a boy, to be brought up with Agrippa.²⁰

Antonia's detention of Livilla and her eventual murder was an atrocity. Perhaps Antonia felt ashamed and disgusted that her daughter fell so short of her own moral standards, and that this was a fitting punishment for her adultery, *stuprum*, and her absence of *pietas* towards her own family.²¹ Livilla's slow death by starvation has a sinister parallel in the live entombment inflicted on Vestal Virgins when they had committed *incestum*. It is important to try and view the event through contemporary eyes, which may have seen Livilla's punishment as deserved and appropriate. Adultery was illegal by this point, and many Romans would have expected no less a punishment to be handed down by the paragon of virtue, the *matrona univira*, that was Antonia.

Nevertheless, Antonia's legacy is respectful and complimentary. As we have seen, despite it all, Claudius ensured that she enjoyed privileges equal to those accorded to Livia. Coins show her as Ceres, goddess of fertility and marriage, or as priestess of the divine Augustus (*sacerdos divi Augusti*). She is

Antonia Sebaste, venerable Augusta; shrines were built in her honour in Naples and Athens, where a cult had been established in the name of her and Drusus. In Rome, she and her sister (the other Antonia) shared a basilica.²²

Julia The Elder (39 BC–AD 14)

Julia Augusti, or Julia Caesaris, was the only blood-related child of Augustus, born in 39 BC. She was the only child from his politically-motivated marriage to Scribonia, his second wife. She was the step-sister—and later second wife—of Tiberius. She was maternal grandmother to Caligula and Agrippina the Younger, grandmother (through marriage) to Claudius, and the maternal great-grandmother of Nero. Livia Drusilla was Julia's stepmother, and Antonia was her first husband's (Tiberius) step-sister. Julia's birthday could not have been less auspicious; she was born on the day on which Octavian divorced her mother in order to marry Livia.

Initially, Julia may have lived with her mother—if we assume that the reason why Scribonia got engaged to Scribonius Aphrodisius was so that she could tutor her daughter. Nevertheless, Scribonia was soon relieved of her maternal duties, and Julia went to live with her father and Livia.¹ Here, she would have enjoyed the company of Livia's children from her first marriage to Tiberius Claudius Nero: Tiberius, three years older than Julia, and Drusus, who was around the same age. In keeping with the attempts of Augustus to resuscitate the *familia* and restore family values—both through example and through legislation, the *Leges Juliae*—Julia received a strict upbringing and a formal education in the Imperial household. The naïve hope and intention was that Julia would grow up to be a paradigm of traditionally wifely values, and a good *matrona*—in a society devoid of *stuprum* and adultery, where modesty, *pietas*, and simple living were the order of the day.

To this end, Julia's curriculum included working the wool (*lanificium*)—the ancient skill which Augustus saw as symbolic of the good old days, when extravagance and adultery were unheard of. As we have seen, the Emperor promoted homespun by wearing it himself and letting the world believe that all the women in the Imperial household were skilled in wool-work (*lanam faciunt*). Macrobius adds that Julia was cultured, that she loved literature, and that she was a *docta puella*; this not that surprising, considering she lived in the household of Augustus.

Her childhood and early adolescence were over-protected, as was the upbringing of her own daughters. As *paterfamilias*, Augustus took responsibility for their education too; Julia's daughters were also taught to work the wool, while her sons—Gaius, Lucius, and Agrippa Postumus—received training in politics and military matters. Augustus himself helped to teach the boys how to swim and read, and trained their handwriting style on that of his own. Suetonius records that Julia and her girls were forbidden to

say anything that was not worthy of inclusion in the Imperial day book, that Julia's visitors were vetted before being allowed access to the house, and that her friendships had to be approved. The Emperor even took the time to personally write to the respectable Lucius Vinicius, upbraiding him for having the temerity to call upon Julia in Baiae without his permission. The children knew their place; at dinner, they reclined beneath him on the lowest couch, and when out they rode either in front of him or at either side. As a portent of things to come, her father privately joked that he had two lovely daughters (*filiae delicatae*) to put up with—Julia, and the Roman state itself.²

Julia's role as a pawn in her father's political games began in 37 BC, when she was just two years old. She became part of a deal between Octavian's friends, Gaius Maecenas, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, and Mark Antony.³ Julia was to be engaged to Antony's ten-year-old son, Marcus Antonius Antyllus.⁴ However, circumstances dictated otherwise; the engagement was called off when Antony was defeated by Augustus (Octavian) at the Battle of Actium. Julia was later betrothed to Cotiso, King of the Getans (the Dacians), with whom Augustus was trying to forge an alliance against Mark Antony—this attempt turned out to be unsuccessful. According to Antony, Augustus was planning to marry Cotiso's daughter, but it all went wrong when Cotiso chose to support Antony.⁵ In 25 BC, when Julia was fourteen years old, she married her cousin, the seventeen-year-old Marcus Claudius Marcellus—rumoured to be the chosen successor of Augustus.⁶ At the time, the Emperor was preoccupied in Spain, and he deputed Agrippa to perform the usual paternal duties. Marcellus died two years later, in September 23 BC, in Baiae; Antonius Musa, the court physician who had recently cured Augustus, failed to save his potential heir. The marriage did not produce any children.

It is impossible to know for certain how far Julia was exposed to outside influences around this time. She would have presumably attended the theatre, the games, and other public events—just like any other girl, wife, or widow of the elite classes. It is reasonable to assume that she was well aware of (and perhaps even attracted to) the poetry of the contemporary love elegists Propertius, Tibullus, Sulpicia, and others, and their patrons. She may even have attended the salons and soireés hosted by men such as the successful general (and even-more successful socialite) M. Valerius Messala Corvinus—patron of Tibullus and Ovid, and uncle of the elegiac poetess Sulpicia. Tibullus, Ovid, Propertius, Horace, and others inhabited and celebrated a world far-removed from the Rome that conservatives like Cato the Younger were anxious to preserve; this world was also far from that which Augustus hoped to restore through legislation and the apparent example of his family. The sophisticated and urbane society of the poets and their modish, euphuistic verses turned the *mores* and customs of traditional Rome on its head; the men in these intelligent coteries were ostensibly dominated by their women (the *dominae*). They were subservient, allowing themselves to be enslaved by love

(*servitium amoris*); their *cursus honorum* was as soldiers of love (*militia amoris*), while their role in the home and family was not marked by anything remotely like patriarchal power (*patria potestas*). These men languished, locked-out and forlorn (*exclusus amator*), on their women's doorsteps. The ladies they pursued were independent, single-minded, vivacious, coquettish, manipulative, and frustrating *doctae puellae*, free to peacock around Rome and Baiae as they pleased; we know them as Cynthia, Delia, Nemesis, and Corinna (among others). Their lovers were a world apart from the ideal Roman male's *virtus*, his power and domination over his wife and children, and his *res gestae*; their own lives were very different from the world of the *matrona* and her state of *univira*, her modesty, and her docility. If one adds to this the fact that Sulpicia became a celebrated poet in her own right, we can begin to appreciate the intoxicating attraction that this heady and exciting alternative lifestyle, both liberal and liberating, held for the youth of the day. It would not be surprising if Julia tasted some of this excitement and independence during her marriage to Marcellus, or indeed if she warmed to the taste during her widowhood.

If Julia had read or heard Propertius and the others (or indeed Catullus, Gallus, or the other *neoteri* of earlier days) then she would recognise instantly this permissive and promiscuous lifestyle. If she needed to be reminded of how it was viewed by less-liberal men, then she would only have needed to read some of Horace's poetry, which was written in around 23 BC. Horace himself celebrated good-time girls as enthusiastically as any love poet, and he was not averse to the pleasures of female company when it suited—particularly the company of dancing girls at the drinking parties he attended. Damalis (*Odes* 1, 36) is leered at remorselessly, Lyde (*Odes* 3, 28) is summoned to play her lyre, and Neaera (*Odes* 3, 14) is required to sing—all as precursors to sex. However, the same poet is at his most vituperative and hypocritical when he deplores the moral decay and turpitude of contemporary Rome, exacerbated by women and their louche behaviour:

...the grown-up girl [who] delights in being taught the Greek movements and is coached in seduction; all she thinks about now is illicit sex from top to toe. Today it's dancing, tomorrow it will be adultery.

Suetonius however, blows the whistle on Horace; in his biography of the poet, he tells us that the poet preferred sex at home to visiting brothels. He invited escorts back to his house, where the mirrors in his bedroom literally reflected his sexual activity (*coitus*) from every angle.

Augustus himself was no model of fidelity. Incredibly, Suetonius maintains that Augustus' affairs were motivated not by lust but by subterfuge, claiming that he used the women to expose the intrigues of their partners—more often than not his political opponents. However, lust was probably responsible for an incident that occurred while he was out for dinner one evening; he led the wife of his host, an ex-consul (possibly Livia), from the

dining room to her bedroom, later returning her to the party with her ears burning (*rubentibus auriculis*) and her hair all over the place. Antony, according to Suetonius, adds that a further four *matronae* were seduced by Augustus during the first decade of his marriage to Livia, including Terentia (or Terentilla), the wife of Maecenas—Horace’s patron. Antony also asked Augustus why he was so exercised by his affair with Cleopatra when Augustus had probably slept with Tertullia, Terentilla, Rufilla, Salvia Titisenia, and the rest of them. Suetonius tells us about Augustus’ Feast of the Divine Twelve—nothing less than an orgy of food and sex, in which the guests came dressed as gods and goddesses. Sexual indiscretion apart, the feast was particularly scandalous because it took place during a time of severe food shortages in Rome; the satire of the day had it that the gods had eaten all of the food in the city. According to Suetonius, Livia was also present. Augustus’ sexual voracity apparently continued well into his old age, when he continued to deflower virgins, sometimes even provided for him by Livia. It is impossible to tell how much of this general promiscuity Julia witnessed, or how much it influenced her own attitudes and actions.

Two years after the death of Marcellus in 21 BC, Julia was dealt her next move in her father’s political power-play; now eighteen, she was married off to Agrippa, her father’s friend and ally. Agrippa was forty-three years old. Julia was a very convenient piece in the political marriage game; Augustus was out of Rome and needed a regent, so his old ally Agrippa was the obvious choice. He was made to divorce his wife, Claudia Marcella Maior, to clear the way for his marriage to Julia. Marcella was one of two daughters (the *Marcellae*) of Octavia, Augustus’ sister. Marcella went on to marry Iullus Antonius, the second son of Mark Antony by his third wife, Fulvia. Not only would Julia’s betrothal enhance Agrippa’s authority in Rome, but it would also provide Augustus with his all-important line of succession. It could be argued that, in the eyes of Augustus, Julia existed for this purpose. Earlier, Maecenas had warned Augustus that, because he had championed Agrippa so much, the Emperor had to either make him his son-in-law or kill him.⁷ Augustus was once again unable to attend his daughter’s wedding; this time, he was indisposed in Sicily. The five children the couple produced between 20 BC and 12 BC satisfied (in theory at least) Augustus’ desire to establish his line of succession. One of the girls, Agrippina the Elder, later married Germanicus, the son of Antonia and Drusus. In 17 BC Augustus adopted two of Julia’s sons, Gaius and Lucius, while Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa Posthumus was belatedly adopted in AD 4.

We will never know how Julia reacted to this appropriation of her sons, who were clearly just two more pawns in her father’s dynastic games. Perhaps she accepted it, along with his later personal control over their education. On the other hand, perhaps it was a cause of resentment; from a purely maternal standpoint, she was sidelined from one of the *matrona*’s traditionally principal functions—overseeing the early education of her sons. Perhaps Julia’s only

consolation is that she (and not Augustus or Agrippa) is depicted with her sons on the celebrated Ara Pacis, completed in 9 BC.

Agrippa, of course, continued with his military career, which took him away from Julia and Rome for extended periods. These separations may have been punctuated by visits home or by an itinerant Julia, seemingly, like Antonia, not averse to travelling with her husband. She may have joined Agrippa in Gaul between 20 BC and 18 BC. In 17 BC she travelled through Greece with Agrippa, and it seems likely that she gave birth to Agrippina at Mytilene, on Lesbos. Once, while on her way to meet Agrippa in Ilium (Troy), she nearly drowned in a flash flood at the River Scamander; an angry Agrippa imposed a severe 100,000 drachmae fine on the locals, but this was later withdrawn.⁸ In 16 BC, Agrippa and Julia visited Herod as part of an eastern tour; in 14 BC, they were in Athens.

Things started to go wrong when Julia began to assert her own individuality. She was no doubt reacting to the oppressed childhood she had endured, the increasingly liberal society around her, and the sexual hypocrisy of her father and his hypocritical legislation. We have already noted the reports (*vulgo existimabatur*) of Julia's serial adultery with Sempronius Gracchus, described by Tacitus (*Annals* 1, 5, 3) as 'persistent adulterer' (*'percivax adulter'*), in addition to rumours of an unhealthy relationship with her stepbrother, Tiberius. Suetonius describes the behaviour of Julia and her sister as 'all kinds of vice'.⁹

In 12 BC Agrippa died suddenly in Campania, after an inconclusive winter campaign. Augustus moved quickly; as soon as Julia (still in mourning) had given birth to Agrippa Postumus, she was betrothed to Tiberius, Augustus' step-son.¹⁰ For Augustus, it was crucial for Julia to remarry—even though she was exempt from the legal obligation to do so, due to the *ius trium liberorum*. He was still obsessing about his succession, despite having adopted Gaius and Lucius (Julia's children, now eight and five years old) as his sons. Political nonentities were an option for Julia; one such candidate was Gaius Proculeius, a friend of Augustus who was more noted for how he died than how he lived. He committed suicide by ingesting gypsum, in a bid to relieve what was probably ulcerative colitis; in those days, gypsum would have been used in the manufacture of plaster for sculptures.

In 11 BC, once Tiberius had been compelled to divorce his pregnant wife Vipsania Agrippina (to his everlasting regret and pain), he reluctantly married Julia, who was now approaching middle age. Suetonius tells us how Tiberius once saw Vipsania in the street, becoming so distraught that measures were taken to prevent a recurrence of the painful sighting.

Suetonius records that, despite a happy start to the marriage, 'living in harmony and with mutual affection' (*'primo concorditer et amore mutuo vixit'*), Tiberius soon came to loathe Julia. The feeling was mutual. She dutifully accompanied him to Illyria, and with Livia celebrated his triumphant return to Rome; however, two events early on in their marriage had a

significant impact. They could have brought the couple closer together, but, as it happened, they had the opposite effect. Firstly, their son died in infancy at Aquileia; secondly, in 9 BC, Drusus (Tiberius' devoted brother) was killed in a riding accident in Germany. Tiberius now condemned Julia's behaviour (her *mores*), possibly feeling guilty over their alleged incest. Meanwhile, she considered him beneath her (*ut imparem*); she sent Augustus a letter, delivered by her lover, Sempronius Gracchus, which spelt this out. Julia was the first to invoke her right from the divine blood of Augustus, but she would not be the last—both Agrippinas did likewise. Tacitus says that Gracchus persistently undermined Julia's relationship with Tiberius, and even composed the damning letter.¹¹ Appropriately, Julia did not attend the dedication of the Shrine of Marital Concord by Tiberius and Livia; Suetonius, in his *Life of Tiberius* (7), reports that they were now sleeping in separate beds. By 6 BC, Tiberius had had enough; when he took refuge in Rhodes as a private citizen, having renounced all of his duties, the couple were separated by more than their beds.

The fifth-century *Saturnalia* of Macrobius (2, 5; based on the contemporary *De Urbanitate* by Domitus Marsus) shows the life of a thirty-eight-year-old Julia; a world of putting on makeup ready to go out, tweezing grey hairs, going to gladiator fights in the company of fashionable young men, and of dressing provocatively. Macrobius illustrates this coquettish behaviour:

...one day she stood before Augustus wearing a daring costume which upset her father, although he kept quiet; the following day she came in dressed much more modestly, at which he expressed his delight that she was now dressed appropriately for a daughter of Augustus.

Julia wittily responded by saying that today she had dressed for her father, yesterday for her husband. Her modish dress-sense was, of course, in direct contrast to the simple and modest homespun clothing Augustus was trying to promote to his subjects. In reply to those people who wondered why she did not conform to her father's prudence and frugality, she pointedly answered according to Macrobius (2, 5, 9-10), 'He forgets that he is Caesar, but I never forget that I am Caesar's daughter'. Julia was very much her own woman. When she was asked how her children all resembled Agrippa when her behaviour was so wayward, she is alleged to have quipped that being pregnant allowed her to pursue her extramarital affairs without fear of falling illegitimately pregnant: 'I never take on a passenger unless the ship is full'. Unfortunately for Julia, a somewhat less-accommodating ship was about to take her into insular exile on Pandateria.

Augustus, fearing that a re-marriage might bring pretenders to his throne, prohibited his daughter from divorcing Tiberius: Julia had to remain a *vidua*. She made the most of her new-found freedom and independence; we cannot know whether she adopted the promiscuous social life of the independent *doctae puellae*, but it seems barely credible that she could withdraw from that

exciting, risqué world—married or not. What happened next would suggest that she did enjoy a life of decadence; again, we have little detail, but in 2 BC Augustus denounced Julia and her behaviour to the Senate. He had her arrested for adultery and treason, and annulled her marriage. To a sensationalist Velleius Paterculus (2, 100), a storm erupted in the house of Augustus: ‘disgusting to describe, repellent to remember’ (*foeda dictu memoroque horrenda*). Augustus found out about his daughter’s all-too-public fornication:

Julia ... scandalously left nothing lustful or lavish undone that a woman could when prostituting herself, and quantified her good fortune by her dissolute sin, claiming she could rightfully do whatever she liked.

Julia ... nihil quid facere aut pati turpiter posset femina, luxuria libidineque infectum reliquit magnitudinemque fortunae suae peccandi licentia metiebatur, quicquid liberet quo licito vindicans.

According to Seneca (*Shortness of Life* 4, 6), whose vocabulary and imagery is even more immoderate, Julia’s sins were like ‘sores’ (*ulcera*) to Augustus; when they were excised, he felt as if he was cutting off his own limbs, which (like Tityos in the myth) kept growing back. Julia’s nocturnal adventures even included prostitution and, ironically, having sex on the statue of Marysas in the Forum—a symbol of hubris, liberty, and freedom of speech (*indictum libertatis*). Even more galling for Augustus must have been the report that Julia regularly fornicated on the very rostra from which he had delivered his moral legislation—which, among other things, criminalised adultery with a sentence of exile on a remote island. We learn from Pliny the Elder that Tiberius claimed Julia had plotted to kill Augustus: ‘that adulterous daughter and her secret plan to kill her father’: (*adulterium filiae et consilium parricidae palam facta*).¹² If this is true, it suggests a level of political ambition and power-seeking hitherto unnoticed, and is an example of the level of contempt in which she now held her father.

Julia’s lovers paid the price. Sempronius Gracchus was exiled to Cercina and, after fourteen years, murdered; Iullus Antonius, son of Mark Antony and Fulvia, was forced into suicide. According to Velleius Paterculus, Julia’s other lovers included T. Quinctius Crispinus, Appius Claudius Pulcher, and Cornelius Scipio. Tiberius was delighted at the news of Julia’s arrest, believing that she deserved everything she got for her adulterous behaviour; however, he magnanimously urged Augustus to reconcile his daughter, and allowed her to keep all the gifts he had given her.¹³

Julia’s sentence was harsh. Augustus exiled his daughter to the tiny island of Pandateria in the Tyrrhenian Sea, off Gaeta (modern-day Ventotene). The island was just two miles long, devoid of men, and alcohol-free; visitors were only allowed with the permission of Augustus, and even then only after a full physical description had been given (including distinguishing features such as

scars and moles). The alcohol ban was presumably due to her father's belief that drink was partly to blame for her promiscuity. Julia's only consolation was that her mother, Scribonia, went with her to the island; Scribonia was a true *matrona*, looking after her daughter come what may. Back in Rome, whenever Julia came up in conversation Augustus would quote Homer's *Iliad*: 'I wish I didn't have a wife and that I died childless.' Henceforth he referred to Julia as one of his three boils or suppurating sores. The situation cannot have been helped by Ovid's eulogistic poem, in which he (with remarkably bad timing) celebrates the achievements of Augustus in ordering women to be faithful and driving out sin: 'he orders the chaste to be chaste and drives out sin', *hic castas duce iubet esse castas ... repulit ille nefas*.¹⁴ Ovid's unsettling praise may even have contributed to his own exile by Augustus in AD 8. *Error et carmen?*

Suetonius suggests that Augustus was even more mortified about Julia's conduct than he was by the deaths of Gaius and Lucius, his beloved grandsons. He shut himself off from the world for a while; the indictment of his daughter was read to the Senate in his absence, when even execution was considered and rejected. Phoebe, one of Julia's freedwomen, was implicated in Julia's infelicities and hanged herself, prompting Augustus to exclaim that he wished he was Phoebe's father.¹⁵

Some 400 years later, Macrobius tells us that Julia was popular with the people on account of her kind, gentle, and forgiving nature and that at the same time it came as a surprise that at the same time she could be so debauched, with all those faults (*vitia*). Tacitus reports that the public called for her to return; Augustus flew into a rage, wishing fornicating daughters and adulterous wives on them if they ever raised the matter again. Augustus was adamant and implacable, anxious to save face and not appear hypocritical in the face of his campaign and legislation for moral regeneration.

Little is known about Julia's elder daughter, Julia the Younger (or Vipsana Julia Agrippina), who was born in around 19 BC. Her life story is tragically reminiscent of that of her mother—she too would lose control of her daughter's upbringing, as Julia had of her sons. In 6 BC, Augustus fixed it for Julia the Younger to marry Lucius Aemilius Paullus, a senator and grandson of Scribonia, her grandmother. Their marital home was large and conspicuous, but this was anathema to Augustus and he had it demolished. In AD 7 or 8—suspiciously close to the time that Paullus was condemned for treason—Vipsana was found guilty of adultery with D. Iunius Silanus, and was banished from Rome to Campania. Further alleged *stuprum* resulted in her exile to the island of Trimerus, in the Adriatic Sea. There is virtually no record of any of this permissiveness, other than Pliny's bizarre report that she boasted of owning the smallest male dwarf in Rome. The only punishment Silanus received was the termination of his friendship with Augustus, according to Tacitus (*Annals* 12, 3). Vipsana was also linked with Ovid who was exiled in Tomis at around the same time that she landed on Trimerus.

Was she implicated in the indiscretion, the *error* that Ovid (*Tristia* 2, 207) claims, along with an injudicious poem, *carmen*, was responsible for his banishment?¹⁶

Julia the Younger may not have been totally without male company on her island, if Suetonius' claim that she gave birth to a child there is to be believed.¹⁷ Augustus, exercising his rights as *paterfamilias* and *ius patrum, ius vitae necisque*, the right of the father to kill the baby, had the baby exposed. After twenty years of exile, Julia the Younger died on Trimerus in AD 28. During this time, she was apparently financially supported by a duplicitous Livia—who was, according to Tacitus, ever-happy to surreptitiously (*per occultum*) compromise her stepchildren and grandchildren when they remained a threat, before publicly (*palam*) helping them when the threat was extinguished.

Julia Augusti missed her wine. She allegedly complained, 'My time here is dreadful, no wine to ease my stress and now lower-class people for me to ridicule.'¹⁸ The absence of wine must have been made more unbearable by the tantalising existence of a small vineyard on the island. After five years, Augustus relented and permitted his daughter to return to the mainland—committing her to remain, under surveillance, in the dreary town of Rhegium (Reggio di Calabria). She was given an allowance (*perculium*) by her father, but was disinherited and denied the honour of being buried in the Mausoleum. When Tiberius acceded, he stopped Julia's *perculium* and ordered that she be confined to one room in her house—house arrest. Tiberius later withdrew all support, allowing Julia to die a slow death by starvation in AD 15—she was depressed and devoid of all hope after the murder of Agrippa Postumus on Planasia. Julia and Agrippa Postumus had represented a threat to Tiberius, as had Sempronius Gracchus; all three were duly murdered, but Julia got revenge (of a sort) when her grandson, Caligula, murdered Tiberius on Capri.

The inevitable effect of what almost amounts to a *damnatio memoriae* (which conceals the exact details of her crime) is that Julia tends to be remembered only for her dissolute behaviour. This is hardly surprising, since most of the memories which have come down to us are recorded by elite men in the tradition of inventing or highlighting the more-prurient corners of the lives of powerful, talented, or influential women. Sallust's Sulpicia, Clodia, Fulvia, and Cleopatra all suffer the same fate, at the hands of a flock of historians with varying degrees of evidence and justification. Velleius Paterculus describes Julia as 'stained by sex or excess', adding a list of her lovers.¹⁹ Seneca says that she had 'adulterers by the herd' ('*admissos gregatim adulteros*'). Pliny the Elder calls her 'the epitome of licentiousness' ('*exemplum licentiae*'), describing her night-time frolics on the statue of Marsyas, which groans under the weight of her 'lewdness' ('*luxuria*'). Dio Cassius records her 'night-time orgies and drinking parties in the Forum, even on the Rostra'. Seneca reminds us that the Rostra was the very place from which Augustus had delivered his moral legislation, *Leges Juliae*, attempting

to restore family values and outlawing adultery, but Julia had chosen to prostitute herself there.²⁰ Marsyas was, amongst other things, a lawyer (*causidicus*) who competed with Apollo in his role as a jurist, the inspiration for Augustus' legislation and reforms. Julia's desecration of this statue, crowning it with a chaplet to signify superiority over Apollo, would have been deeply insulting to Augustus, for whom it would have been tantamount to desecration of his programme of reform. His expunging of her memory was so effective that only two busts of Julia—his only daughter, indeed his only natural child—remain.

Julia was undoubtedly promiscuous, but we should not forget that she was also remembered, in the words of Macrobius, as a 'decent, kind, and gentle woman' (*'mitis humanitas minimeque saevus animus'*).²¹ Her influence on her world was largely indirect; she was a pawn in her father's selfish and manipulative political intrigues. Her helplessness and feelings of exploitation probably ignited in her a need for retaliation. She exerted a spirited (albeit shameful) independence of mind, which had the unfortunate effect of reducing the Emperor of Rome, her father, to frustrated vindictiveness—thereby inciting the invective of generations of historians. Her defiance exposed her father's hypocrisy and the double standards of a society where men could commit adultery with impunity, where wives were expected to be tolerant of this, and where adulteresses were criminalised and vilified.²²

Agrippina the Elder (14 BC–AD 33)

Vipsania Agrippina II (Agrippina Major or Agrippina the Elder) was born in 14 BC, daughter of Julia Augusti and Agrippa, and sister of Julia the Younger. She was the second granddaughter of Augustus, and sister-in-law, stepdaughter, and daughter-in-law of Tiberius. She was the mother of Caligula, maternal second cousin and sister-in-law of Emperor Claudius, and maternal grandmother of Nero. She married Germanicus in around AD 5, when she would have been approximately eighteen years old. His mother's marriage to Agrippa was her second, and Agrippa's third, so Agrippina had two half-sisters—Vipsania Agrippina I and Vipsania Marcella Agrippina—from Agrippa's first marriage to Pomponia Caecilia Attica. Vipsania Agrippina I was the first wife of Tiberius, but Augustus forced them to divorce so that Julia could marry Tiberius. Agrippina had four full-blood siblings from the marriage of Julia and Agrippa—Julia the Younger, Gaius Caesar, Lucius Caesar, and Agrippa Postumus.

Agrippina was born in Athens, while her mother was accompanying Agrippa on one of his many trips abroad. However, her early childhood was spent under the aegis of Augustus and Livia, with Augustus taking control of the education of Agrippina, her sister, and her brothers—as he had done with her mother. As we know, the education of the girls was particularly formal and strict. They were expected to be exemplars of the traditional Roman *matrona*: modest, faithful, fertile, domesticated, and wool-working. They were to be held up as shining examples of the type of womanhood to which every decent Roman woman should aspire; to that end, visitors and friends were vetted and nothing could be uttered that would not sit well in the Imperial day book.

Agrippina's marriage to Germanicus was a happy union, and certainly productive. Three of their children died in childbirth, but six survived: Nero Caesar, Drusus Caesar, and Gaius (Caligula), Agrippina the Younger (Julia Agrippina, mother of Nero), Julia Drusilla, and Julia Livilla. Germanicus, a scion of both the Julian and Claudian families, had been adopted by Tiberius in AD 4, and was clearly a contender to succeed Augustus; he was popular with the Roman people, and had the common touch. Agrippina's fecundity (*insigne fecunditate*), her peerless moral rectitude (*praeclara pudicitia*), and her maternalism made her equally popular with the Romans.

In AD 9 Rome suffered one of its worst military disasters, when Publius Quinctilius Varus was ambushed by the Roman-trained German chief Arminius in the Teutoburger Wald; three legions were totally annihilated. The

situation on the German frontier would remain tense and unpredictable for years to come. Augustus died in August AD 14—a first for a nervous and unsettled Rome, which had never experienced the death of an Emperor before, or indeed the ensuing Imperial succession. Tacitus records that soon after Tiberius succeeded Augustus, Agrippina (pregnant with Agrippina Minor) accompanied Germanicus to Germany to suppress a mutiny amongst a number of legions. The legions were disaffected because they had not been released from service five years after their enlistment, and were suffering in the wake of the Teutoburger calamity. Moreover, Tiberius was not the most popular of generals or Emperors.

There was no love lost between Tiberius and Livia, and Germanicus and Agrippina. Tacitus says that Livia harboured the animosity towards Agrippina that is typical of a stepmother (*muliebris offensiones*).¹ In the next paragraph Tacitus informs us that Agrippina, on the other hand, was excitable—but she used her indomitable spirit to good end, being a devoted and faithful wife to her husband (*ipsa Agrippina paulo commotior, nisi quod castitate et mariti amore quamvis indomitum animum in bonum vertebat*). Gaius soon followed his mother to Germany, where he won his nickname—Caligula—for the little boots he wore around the camp.

It seems that Germanicus was fast-tracked through his *cursus honorum*, exempted from having to hold the position of praetor; it seems too that Augustus' intention was for Germanicus to be co-heir with his cousin, Drusus Caesar. It is easy to guess what Livia thought of this.

At least four legions were implicated in the mutiny in Germany. The situation was exacerbated by poor treatment at the hands of officers and the soldiers' demand for money owed to them in the will of Augustus. They reluctantly swore an oath of allegiance to Tiberius under orders from Germanicus, but the atmosphere remained very tense: officers were being thrown into the Rhine. The pregnant Agrippina and Caligula began to play a significant role. Tacitus describes how the troops valued Agrippina's qualities as a *matrona*; they admired her fertility, her renowned chastity, and the fact that she took the trouble to visit their camps with Germanicus (even giving birth to Caligula there). They called her: '*ipsa insigni fecunditate, praeclara pudicitia; iam infans in castris genitus...*'² Agrippina cleverly exploited her popularity, and her condition. Her presence at first left the soldiers cowed, but they were soon angrily revived by a demonstration to Germanicus of just how overdue their discharge was: one veteran thrust Germanicus' hand into his edentulous mouth to show how old he was. The rebellion culminated in the legions demanding that Germanicus depose Tiberius. Germanicus was appalled at the suggestion, threatening (or pretending to threaten) to kill himself; despite some efforts to restrain him, other, more-cynical troops told him to go ahead—one even offered Germanicus his own sword because it was sharper. Confusion reigned as the mutineers tried to enlist more legions to their cause.

Germanicus resorted to duplicity, pretending he had received a letter from Tiberius agreeing to discharge the troops who had reached the end of their service, and double the pay promised by Augustus. Two legions accepted, and two did not. Germanicus managed to find the money required and pay off the troops, who called off the mutiny and swore an oath of allegiance to Tiberius. All seemed well until a delegation arrived from Rome, denying all knowledge of the letter and the terms. The mutiny was back on; Germanicus' standards were removed and, with them, his command of the armies on the Rhine. It was at this point that Agrippina took control of events. The decision was made for her and Caligula to leave the camp, along with the other women and children, for the safety of a Gallic settlement; perversely, the Gauls were proving more loyal than the legions. By pretending to leave with reluctance, Agrippina evoked shame and pity among the troops and engineered a turning point in the mutiny. In contrast to Tacitus, however, Dio records that Agrippina and Caligula were held hostage by the mutineers.³ Whatever the case, the mutiny fizzled out and the ringleaders were slain. Germanicus then attacked and defeated the Germans, even gloriously winning back one of the standards that had been lost in the Teutoburger Wald.

Pliny the Elder (author of the lost *German Wars*), who had served under Germanicus, apparently told how, in AD 15, Germanicus then made a determined push towards the Elbe. The plan failed when he overreached himself, advancing as far as the Teutoburger Wald—the very place where Varus and his legions had been ignominiously annihilated by Arminius in AD 9. Arminius successfully attacked the Romans from all around with his guerrilla units; one detachment was trapped, and memories of Teutoburger Wald loomed large. In panic, the Romans rushed to the Rhine Bridge at Castra Vetera (Xanten), aiming to destroy it and prevent the Germans from crossing behind them. Agrippina realised that this would maroon many Roman soldiers on the wrong side of the river, exposing them to the Germans. Accordingly, she took up a position on the bridge, preventing its destruction: the pregnant Agrippina stood here, at the head of the bridge, encouraging, resupplying, and providing field dressings for the returning legions. Tacitus (*Annals* 1, 69) calls her a great-minded woman (*femina ingens animi*) who assumed the role of a general (*munia ducis*), inspecting the troops and distributing bonuses until Germanicus arrived. Agrippina had saved the day, and salvaged the career of her husband.⁴

We have already encountered the extreme (but typical) views of Aulus Caecina Severus in AD 21, in relation to women accompanying their men in the field. Tiberius took a similarly dim view, complaining that women were taking over the army and that his generals were now redundant. A further, tragic example of a woman infiltrating the military occurred in AD 39, during the reign of Caligula. Gaius Calvisius Sabinus had been accused of *maiestas* in AD 31, after the fall of Sejanus, but he had survived. Now he was under suspicion by Caligula; Cornelia, his wife, was reputedly in the habit of

watching soldiers during exercises. Less innocently, she also visited sentries at night, dressed in military uniform and offering her services. One such night she was caught *in flagrante* in the headquarters; she and Sabinus committed suicide. This served as useful propaganda to deter women from fraternising with the military.

It seems that Tiberius was disturbed by Agrippina's influence in the German campaign, particularly as she had helped to suppress a mutiny where he had failed.⁵ In AD 17 Agrippina followed her husband to the eastern provinces, where Julia Livilla, their last child, was born in the city of Mytilene. Tiberius invested Germanicus with supreme power (*maius imperium*) over the local governors.

Relations between Tiberius and Agrippina continued to deteriorate, and came to a disastrous head in AD 19 when Germanicus quarreled with Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, the governor of Syria. Soon after, Germanicus died in suspicious circumstances, with allegations involving Piso, Tiberius, and black magic; Piso's wife, Plancina, was a close friend of Livia and escaped prosecution. A bereft and grieving Agrippina returned to Rome something of a heroine, carrying her husband's ashes and accusing Piso of his murder; Piso was either forced to commit suicide or murdered on the orders of Tiberius. Agrippina's dignified behaviour won her the sympathy and respect of the Roman people, and it was at this point that she assumed the role of Rome's first *matrona* from an increasingly duplicitous Livia. The death of Germanicus caused much doom-laden despair amongst the people—shops closed, temples were attacked, and even children were exposed. However, it was Agrippina's mournful, impeccably-timed, and theatrical arrival at Brundisium, with the ashes of her husband, and with Livilla and Caligula in tow, which caused Tiberius the greatest anxiety. This was made all the more acute because of his absence from the ceremony taking the ashes to the Mausoleum of Augustus—a snub which did not go unnoticed. Agrippina was the glory of her country, the only true descendent of Augustus, and the unequalled paragon of matronly behaviour—ominously, the people prayed that her children would survive their enemies. The port was packed with mourners, including many veterans who had served under Germanicus; the ship was rowed at a funereal pace, and Agrippina's procession with the children excited palpable pathos amongst the crowd, climaxing in a collective groan. The journey through southern Italy towards Rome was similarly respectful; the symbols of office (*fasces*) were reversed, the people wore mourning clothes, and the local equestrians wore their purple. The four-years-old younger Agrippina met the procession at Tarracina, on the Appian Way, 60 miles south of Rome.

More theatre followed in Rome. The mourning family was met by the consuls, Marcus Valerius and Marcus Auerelius, and by other senators. The Campus Martius was illuminated by blazing torches as Agrippina was hailed as splendour of her country (*decus patriae*), and as a unique paradigm of ancient tradition (*unicum antiquitatis specimen*).

An official endorsement of Agrippina came in the *Senatus Consultum de Cnaeo Pisone Patre* of 10 December AD 20 (the charges and verdict against Piso). Included in the document is the following:

Agrippina, who was greatly commended to the Senate by the memory of the deified Augustus, by whom she had been greatly esteemed, and of her husband Germanicus, with whom she had lived in unique harmony, and the numerous children born by a birth most fortunate for those who survived.⁶

However, Agrippina was nothing if not impetuous, and doggedly determined to discover the truth about the death of Germanicus. Before he died, Germanicus had been only too aware of Agrippina's resoluteness, and gave perhaps the best picture of Agrippina's character on his deathbed. Certain that he had been poisoned, he lamented, in the words of Tacitus, 'They'll weep over the man who once flourished and survived so many battles, now felled by a woman's treachery' (*'inlacrimabunt quondam florentem et tot bellorum superstitem muliebri fraude cecidisse'*).⁷ On the face of it, Germanicus is referring to Plancina, but he could possibly be implicating Livia too. He appealed to his wife to reign in her fierceness (*ferocia*), for his and their children's sakes, to submit to the vagaries of savage fortune, and not to rile those back in Rome who were strong enough to do her harm, exploiting her actions to gain power. In other words, her involvement would be deliberately misinterpreted as personal ambition—Sejanus would see to that. Agrippina's intransigence eventually led to her downfall. Her insistence that Tiberius was an imposter who was, unlike her, devoid of Augustan blood, and her suspicion of the motives of Tiberius only served to stoke the enmity of Tiberius himself, and the suspicions of his mother, Livia Drusilla.

Nevertheless, things seemed to go well for three years or so. The adopted Nero and Drusus became part of the Tiberian family, and Tiberius celebrated their coming of age by parading them before the Senate. Nero was married to the daughter of Drusus Caesar. However, the death of Drusus Caesar—originally thought to be from natural causes—was later linked to a conspiracy led by Sejanus, and Agrippina's position became increasingly fragile. Tacitus later peddled rumours suggesting that Agrippina was infiltrating the priestly colleges in AD 24, when Drusus and Nero were (perhaps inadvertently) included in the priests' vows for the wellbeing of the Emperor. Tiberius, encouraged by Sejanus, was incensed by this: he was urged to see it as the start of a worrying and threatening Agrippina-led faction in Rome—the *partes Agrippinae*. This was the first time that a woman had been described as the head of a political faction in Rome.

Agrippina's widowhood—during which she was plagued by illness and loneliness—was spent raising and educating her children with the help of Livia and Antonia, her mother-in-law. It had soon become apparent that she would disregard the deathbed pleas of her husband, moving into the political maelstrom that he had begged her to shun, promoting her sons as successors

to Tiberius over Tiberius Gemellus—son of Drusus and Livilla, grandson of Tiberius, and cousin of Caligula. She then became involved with that faction of senators who opposed the increasing power and ominous influence held by Lucius Aelius Sejanus. This led to further conflict with Tiberius, exacerbated even more in AD 26, when a stubbornly angry (*pervicax irae*) Agrippina had her impassioned sick-bed request to re-marry rejected—wishing, it seems, to make the senator Gaius Asinius Gallus Salonius her husband. Agrippina tactlessly reacted by insulting Tiberius. Asinius Gallus later married Vipsania, the loving wife who Tiberius had been forced to divorce by Augustus.⁸ Tiberius left Agrippina to stew (*instans*).⁹ In AD 30 Tiberius declared Gallus a public enemy, and had him held in solitary confinement; Dio tells us that ‘he had no friend or servant with him, no one to talk to; he saw no one except when he ate. The quality of the food and the amount were such as to give him no nourishment or strength, nor to let him die.’¹⁰ He did eventually die of starvation, three years later, without trial. When Agrippina died, in October of the same year, Tiberius accused her of taking Asinius Gallus as a lover. Gallus was further inflicted with *damnatio memoriae*. Tacitus’ source was the memoirs written by the younger Agrippina.

Sejanus was head of the Praetorian Guard from AD 14 until his death in AD 31. He developed the unit from an innocuous Imperial bodyguard to a much-feared political force of 12,000 troops, which dispensed high-profile arbitrary justice and summary executions in the name of public order and security.¹¹ To Tiberius, Sejanus was, in the report by Tacitus ‘my ally in my troubles’.¹² After years of increasing conflict with Drusus Julius Caesar, the son and potential heir of Tiberius, Sejanus seduced Livilla, Drusus’ wife—the couple brought about the murder of Drusus by poisoning in AD 23. When Tiberius retreated to Capri in AD 26, seemingly oblivious of his friend’s complicity, Sejanus effectively became ruler of Rome, with designs on the lives of Agrippina’s sons, Nero Caesar, Drusus Caesar, and Caligula, now potential successors to Tiberius.¹³ ¹⁴ He rejected an attempt at a triple poisoning, on account of the loyalty of the boy’s sons and (extraordinarily) Agrippina’s unyielding virtue (*pudicitia impenetrabilis*). Sejanus concentrated on fuelling Livia’s animosity by various slanders which she would then report to Tiberius; he highlighted Agrippina’s supposed arrogance (*contumacia*), her pride in her own fertility, and her popularity with the people, while she was constantly salivating at the prospect of taking Tiberius’ throne. Significantly, Tacitus calls her *mater Agrippina* here, suggesting that in promoting her sons towards the succession, in defiance of the ambitions of Sejanus, Agrippina was hastening the destruction of her family.¹⁵ Livilla and Mutilia Prisa, another of Livia’s close and influential friends, were complicit with this.

Things came to a head in AD 26, when Agrippina’s cousin, Claudia Pulchra, was brought to trial on charges of adultery with Furnius, of attempting to poison Tiberius, and of casting magic spells on him. The prosecutor was the corrupt Cnaeus Domitius Afer. Tacitus records how the

ever-fearsome Agrippina, fired up by Claudia's predicament, rushed to confront Tiberius, demanding to know why she was being framed, just because the two women were friends ('*Agrippina semper atrox, tum et periculo propinquae accensa*').¹⁶ Agrippina found Tiberius busy sacrificing to Augustus, and berated him for honouring dumb statues while persecuting her, the flesh and blood of Augustus. Agrippina then burned her bridges when she exclaimed that Tiberius was using the prosecution of Claudia Pulchra to get at her, a true descendent of the divine Augustus (*caelesti sanguine ortam*). At this, an angry Tiberius quoted a line from a Greek tragedy: '... and if you are not queen, my dear, have I then done you wrong?'¹⁷

Tacitus records another pivotal incident at a dinner, later in AD 26, when Tiberius invited Agrippina to eat an apple. She was only too aware of plots to poison her and so declined, believing it to be poisoned; the suggestion that Tiberius was intent on murdering her apparently made him even more determined to do so.¹⁸ On the sidelines, Livia was also a constant enemy, ever conscious that Agrippina was advocating for her sons to succeed her own.¹⁹

By now, Sejanus was picking off Agrippina's supporters one by one. He had virtually free reign, with Tiberius away in Capri. Ironically, Livia would act as a brake on his ruthlessness, but when she died in AD 29 he was free to act as he pleased—leaving Agrippina with no sanctuary. Purges of senators and wealthy equestrians opposed to Sejanus followed, with false accusations of treason leading to numerous suicides and executions.²⁰ These included that of Gaius Asinius Gaullus Saloninus, Agrippina's lover. Quinctilius Varus, the son of Claudia Pulchra and betrothed to Livilla, was arrested, probably charged with *maiestas*. Before long, Sejanus turned his attention to Agrippina and Nero; he held them under virtual house arrest, with Agrippina confined to her villa in Herculaneum. *Agents provocateurs* were embedded there to tempt her to make a run for the armies on the Rhine, or else to seek sanctuary at the statue of Divus Augustus whilst gathering popular support.²¹ Nero was interrogated, and indiscreetly gave enough information to enable Tiberius to arrest Titus Sabinus, a former friend of Germanicus. His house was bugged by stooges hiding in the roof space, taking down incriminating words Sabinus said about Tiberius. On 1 January AD 28 he was tried and executed; his body was thrown down the Gemonian Stairs (the Stairs of Mourning), but not before he joked that this was a terrible way to start the New Year.

Sejanus persuaded Tiberius to pen a letter to the Senate denouncing Agrippina, falsely charging her of taking sanctuary behind the statue of Augustus or of siding with a legion on the Rhine—thus suggesting, but not explicitly stating, a plot to depose Tiberius. The letter was a slur on the characters of both Agrippina and Nero. He was accused of 'loving young men and lewdness' ('*amores iuvenum et impudicitiam nepoti obiectabat*'), and she was accused of impudence and arrogance ('*adrogantiam oris et contumacem animum incusavit*').²² The Senate was panic-stricken and dumbfounded, while angry popular opinion maintained that the letter was a fiction.

Tacitus tells how Agrippina and Nero were then arrested. They were exiled in AD 30; she was sent to Pandateria, the same island her mother had endured for five years, while he was sent to Pontia (modern-day Ponza, near to Pandateria).²³ In AD 31 the mendacious and evil Sejanus was finally exposed in a letter delivered to Tiberius by Antonia, Agrippina's mother-in-law; he was accused of plotting against Tiberius and executed, along with most of his family.

Drusus, meanwhile, was starved to death in a cell on the Palatine—but not before he had been reduced to eating the stuffing from his mattress to stave off his hunger.²⁴ According to Tacitus, when Drusus had died Tiberius trumped up charges against him of treason as a public enemy (*infestum republicae*), murder, and immorality. He read out fictitious reports of his daily utterances, gathered by informants who claimed Drusus was delirious, that he desired to murder his daughter-in-law, grandchildren, and nephew, and that he was deadly to his own family (*exitialis suos*). Nero committed suicide when confronted by the executioner, carrying his noose and the hooks which would be used to drag his corpse to the Tiber, back in Rome.

Suetonius tells us how the bodies of Agrippina and Nero were then hacked to small pieces, and Caligula was charged with the gruesome task of piecing together the remains for burial.²⁵ Agrippina had died of self-inflicted starvation, bereft after hearing the news of the death of Drusus—although Tacitus suggests that she may have been starved to death deliberately.²⁶ We know from Suetonius that she was an intractable prisoner; she was once flogged, losing an eye in the assault, and she went on hunger strike, having to be force-fed by having her jaws prised open.

Tiberius tarred Agrippina and Sejanus with the same brush. He ordained that the deaths of Agrippina and Sejanus (which happened to occur on the same day, 17 October) be marked as a day of ill-omen, with sacrifices to Jupiter. He also claimed credit for not having Agrippina strangled and her body thrown down the Gemonian steps. Tacitus rejects the allegation of adultery with Asinius Gallus as a calumny, and also dismisses Agrippina's consequent loss of the will to live.²⁷ His obituary asserts that Agrippina knew no womanly weaknesses—on the contrary, she suffered no rivals, she was hungry for power, and, as such, she behaved as a man would.²⁸

The only surviving male member of Agrippina's family, Caligula, dutifully honoured her after her death. He personally collected her ashes from Pandateria (and Nero's from Pontia), and then had them paraded (along with the remains of Drusus) through Rome by the most distinguished soldiers of the day, heading for the Mausoleum of Augustus. In rejection of the day of ill-omen, Caligula fixed a day each year for people to offer funeral sacrifices to his late relatives. He devoted the Circus Games to Agrippina's memory, and had a statue made of Agrippina paraded in a covered carriage at the Games. Gold and silver coins bearing the images of Germanicus and Agrippina were minted. Caligula then ordered the evidence from Tiberius' treason trials to be

brought to the Forum and burnt, starting with the cases against Agrippina and his two brothers. However, Suetonius records how Caligula spoilt it all by suggesting that Agrippina was born out of an incestuous affair between Augustus and Julia the Elder.²⁹

According to Pliny and Tacitus, Agrippina's eldest daughter, Agrippina the Younger, wrote three memoirs—all lost. One was an account of her mother's life, another about the fortunes of the family, and the third on their misfortunes (*casus suorum*). Both Tacitus and Pliny the Elder made use of these memoirs as primary research in their work.³⁰

Agrippina was an influential woman on a number of levels, but her impetuosity and her aggressive nature were to be her downfall. She was undoubtedly a faithful wife, supporting Germanicus and travelling extensively with him. However, she probably overstepped the mark and involved herself in military matters where she had no real business; nevertheless, she won the support of the troops, and no doubt helped her husband's position during the German mutiny. Her later disregard for Germanicus' dying plea (that she curb her fiery temperament and stay out of politics) showed her to be determined to avenge his death and establish the exact circumstances of his demise; in this, she influenced Piso's fate. She no doubt had her children's interests at heart, and as a mother and a *matrona*, was determined to see them succeed Tiberius—an ill-judged decision. In conjunction with her desire to remarry (and thereby losing her status as a *univira*), this would not have been seen by her male contemporaries as the actions of a good *matrona*. For some, when a wife's husband died (or would imminently) due to politics, it was expected that the wife would commit suicide.³¹ Her obstinacy and opposition to Sejanus—while brave—eventually proved to be imprudent.

Messalina (AD 25–48)

Valeria Messalina was the third wife of Claudius, paternal cousin of Nero, second cousin of Caligula, and great-grandniece of Augustus. She was the second child and first daughter of Domitia Lepida the Younger (b. c. 10 BC) and her first cousin, Marcus Valerius Messalla Barbus (11 BC–AD 20). On the death of her first husband, Lepida married the consul Faustus Cornelius Sulla Lucullus III, great-grandson of the dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Their son, Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix, was born in or around AD 22; he was consul in AD 52, and married Claudia Antonia, a daughter of Claudius by Aelia Paetina. Little is known of Messalina before her marriage to Claudius, her second cousin, in AD 38. Claudia Octavia, their daughter, was born in AD 39 or 40, and later became Nero's first wife; Tiberius Claudius Caesar Germanicus—later Britannicus—followed, in AD 41. The pride of Claudius in his son and heir was clearly evident when he showed the infant off to the Praetorian Guard. On 24 January AD 41 Caligula and his family were murdered, and the Praetorian Guard proclaimed Claudius Emperor.

Claudius scored a resounding political and military victory in AD 43 when he conquered the island of Britannia, extending the northern boundary of the empire and eclipsing Julius Caesar's forays some ninety years earlier. The subsequent victory parade in AD 44 gave Messalina her first opportunity to shine, and to display her new privileges as first lady of Rome. She was carried through the city in a prestigious *carpentum* (a two-wheeled covered carriage associated with *matronae*), behind her husband, the Emperor, but ahead of the victorious campaign generals.¹ Their son was given the name Britannicus, in honour of his father's achievement, after Claudius had rejected it when offered the honour by the Senate. Messalina's birthday became an official celebration, with statues and the best seats at the games (alongside the Vestal Virgins) following. Nevertheless, Claudius also declined the Senate's offer to honour Messalina with the title of Augusta.² Approximately fifty years later, Juvenal alluded to this when he described Messalina as 'the whore Augusta' ('*meretrix Augusta*'), itself an allusion to Propertius' description of Cleopatra as the 'whore queen' ('*meretrix regina*'). To Dio, Messalina was little more than 'an adulteress and harlot ... for in addition to her shameless behaviour in general, she at times sat as a prostitute in the Imperial palace, and compelled other women of the highest rank to do the same.'³

It was not long before an insecure Messalina began her campaign to eliminate potential obstacles to Britannicus' succession. The first victim was Julia Livilla, the niece of Claudius and sister of Agrippina. Messalina had

accused Julia of adultery; this went no further, but according to Dio, in AD 41 Julia antagonised Messalina by not showing her respect—because of her beauty, and the private time she was able to spend with her uncle, Claudius. This resulted in a second exile—according to Dio, this was on charges of adultery with Seneca, but according to Suetonius she was exiled on ‘no particular charge’ (*‘incerto crimine’*). Livilla died, very soon, through enforced starvation. It seems likely that the real cause of Messalina’s opposition was Livilla’s husband, Marcus Vinicianus (c. 5 BC–AD 46), a Senator who (according to Josephus) had designs on the throne; he was dispatched by Messalina in AD 46.⁴ Vincianus was implicated in the conspiracy against Claudius led by Lucius Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus. It came to nothing—Scribonianus was murdered in sanctuary on Issa, and Vinicianus committed suicide. Appius Junius Silanus, consul in AD 28 and husband of Messalina’s mother, was also killed; Messalina and Narcissus accused him of conspiring to assassinate Claudius, claiming that they had dreamt they had seen Silanus attempting to murder the Emperor. They contrived to have him turn up for a meeting in Messalina’s bedroom, where he was framed. Both Vinicianus and Silanus had allegedly rejected Messalina’s sexual advances; Cantoni^{us} Justus, a praetorian guard who threatened to expose Messalina’s infelicities, was slain for his troubles.⁵ Gaius Asinius Pollio, son of Gaius Asinius Gallus and Vipsania Agrippina (first wife of Tiberius), was exiled in AD 45 for conspiracy, and was later put to death on Messalina’s orders. Pompeius Magnus (AD 30–47), the husband of Claudius’s daughter Antonia, was stabbed while in bed with a favourite catamite.⁶ This catalogue of murders clearly illustrates Messalina’s dangerous power and the evil body of support she had built up around her.

By AD 47 it must have been very apparent to Messalina that Nero, Agrippina’s son, was a more than credible candidate to succeed Claudius. However, an early attempt to assassinate Nero, in AD 41, can only be described as ham-fisted. The hired assassins ‘saw’ a snake emerging from his pillow and considered it to be a bad omen, but the shape turned out to be nothing more than the slough of a dead snake. The assassination, nevertheless, was off. Agrippina rubbed salt in Messalina’s wounded pride by encasing the snakeskin in a golden bracelet, for Nero to wear. At the AD 47 Secular Games, Agrippina further infuriated Messalina when (at the performance of the *Lusus Troiae* traditionally enacted by the crème of the aristocratic youth) Agrippina and nine-year-old Nero won louder applause than Messalina and six-year-old Britannicus.

However, Messalina went too far when, in the same year, she ordered the execution of the celebrated Decimus Velerius Asiaticus, celebrated as the first Gaul to win a consulship. He was the husband of Lollia Saturnia, the sister of Caligula’s third wife, Lollia Paulina; his immense wealth allowed him to purchase and develop the sumptuous gardens of Lucullus, the renowned general, politician, and gourmet. Messalina coveted these gardens, and was

similarly motivated by jealousy towards the beautiful Poppaea Sabina (the mother of Nero's wife), with whom Asiaticus was having an affair. She was also a rival to Messalina's own affections for Mnester, the famous Greek dancer. Asiaticus was arrested by Publius Suillius Rufus while holidaying in Baiae, and was accused of adultery with Poppaea, bribing the army (suggesting treason), and, worst of all, of effeminacy—the humiliating and derogatory opposite of *virtus*, the true badge of Roman manhood. Messalina and Vitellius were able to persuade Claudius that executing Asiaticus was the only option; Asiaticus duly opened his veins, concluding resignedly that he was the victim of 'a woman's guile' (*'fraus muliebris'*). Poppaea committed suicide soon afterwards.⁷

The elimination of Asiaticus—without trial—amounted to a serious miscalculation on Messalina's part. This, alongside the animosity aroused by the greedy bullying of Suillius and the order to exile Polybius, won the Empress no friends and considerable unpopularity. Polybius was one of Claudius's freemen, a reliable and faithful researcher in his literary, legal, and historical endeavours; he was eventually executed for alleged crimes against the state, trumped up by Messalina when he outstayed his welcome as a lover.⁸ On the other hand, Lucius Vitellius, an ally of Agrippina, managed to attach himself to the court of Claudius. Suetonius tells the strange story of Vitellius' shoe fetish: he would beg Messalina to allow him to remove her shoes, whereupon he would secrete one of them in his clothing, removing it from time to time to kiss it. This was not Vitellius' only paraphilia; he was in the habit of mixing the saliva of a former freedwoman mistress with honey, before using it as a lotion for his neck and throat.⁹

Messalina's biggest and most bizarre *faux pas*, however, was her bigamous marriage to Gaius Silius (b. c. AD 13) in AD 48, and the discovery of the couple's plot to kill Claudius. According to Tacitus, who was himself taken aback by the fantasy of it all—her adulterous affairs had become so routine and casual that she drifted, trance-like, into 'unheard-of lust' (*'incognitas libidines'*).¹⁰ Messalina forced Silius to divorce his wife, Junia Silana. Junia was a friend of Agrippina, but they later became rivals, and Agrippina was probably responsible for her exile and subsequent death at Tarentum in AD 59. The lavish wedding of Messalina and Silius was marked by 'prodigious infamy' (*'magnitudinem infamiae'*), complete with a bridal gown, witnesses, sacrifices, a wild Bacchanalia of a party, and breakfast. This all took place while an oblivious Claudius was at Ostia.¹¹ This disarmingly naïve plan was for Silius to adopt Britannicus, so that he and Messalina could rule on behalf of their son until he came of age; he was then aged seven. Tiberius Claudius Narcissus exposed their sham marriage and their plot to kill Claudius, using two of Claudius's mistresses (Calpurnia and Cleopatra) as messengers. Narcissus was another of Claudius's freedmen, and wielded great influence in the Imperial court—he was responsible for communications (*praepositus ab epistulis*). Like the other freedmen, Narcissus would have

been particularly stung and unnerved by the treatment meted out to Polybius; Messalina's rough handling had lost her the invaluable support of the freedmen surrounding the Emperor.

In the meantime, furniture and possessions were moved from the Imperial Palace to Silius's house, while an infatuated Messalina showered Silius with gifts. The partying and fantasy came to an abrupt end, however, when Messalina realised that she had been betrayed by Narcissus. Claudius reacted to the news of the coup with incredulity, asking time and again in consternation if he was still Emperor. In desperation, Messalina invoked her children and enlisted the support of Vibidia—the influential chief Vestal Virgin—who demanded that Messalina be allowed to plead her case. The farcical nature of the incident was heightened further when Messalina attempted to forestall the returning Emperor and win sympathy by hijacking a lift on a cart full of garden refuse. The allusions of Tacitus to the gardens of Lucullus and the victory parade *carpentum*—symbols of Messalina's former glory—are exquisite.¹² Of course, the cuckolded Claudius was having none of it—under pressure from Vibidia, he promised Messalina that he would attend to the matter the following day, while she reflected on the enormity of her stupidity and cupidity in the appropriated gardens of Lucullus.

By now, Claudius was 'incandescent, exploding with threats' (*incensumque et ad minas erumpentem*). The soldiers were briefed, and proceeded to arrest and execute Silius, other guilty *equites*, and guards. Mnester showed the whip marks caused by Messalina's flagellation, but was not spared—after all, he was a dancer (*histrion*), and how could he be pardoned when so many illustrious men were dying? Likewise, Sextus Traulus Montanus, a knight who had suffered the indignity of being summoned and immediately dismissed by a capricious Messalina one night, was also now executed. Perversely, Suilius Caesonius was spared because Messalina had forced him to play the role of a woman in a squalid orgy (*in illo foedissimo coetu passus muliebria*). Claudius presumably thought that he had suffered enough.

Messalina was joined in the gardens by her mother, Domitia Lepida the Younger—this was an extraordinary act of *pietas* and *matrona*-like behaviour on her part, considering the gulf that had divided them for many years. Desperate and angry letters were written, while wine helped Claudius to calm down and adopt a more sympathetic attitude to his remorseful wife—he was now describing her as 'the poor woman' (*misera*); anger (*ira*) was now giving way to love (*amor*), and the fear, according to Tacitus, was that he would submit to 'memories of the conjugal bed' (*uxorii cubiculi memoria*).¹³ Narcissus saw this and realised that the whole affair could rebound on him. He moved quickly; Claudius's soldiers arrived in the gardens, and Lepida advised her daughter to commit suicide. Messalina could not summon the courage, and botched the attempt; she was then run through with a soldier's sword. Claudius received the news while dining and reacted with indifference,

continuing his feast. Suetonius, in an illustration of Claudius's 'absent-mindedness and myopia' ('*meteoria*' and '*ablepsia*'), adds that Claudius actually asked where Messalina was when she had failed to turn up for dinner that night.¹⁴

Messalina's legacy was her second-to-none reputation for promiscuity, and a *damnatio memoriae*—only the second woman, after Livilla, to receive such a condemnation. Monuments from Rome to Verona, in Italy, and from Lepcis Magna to Arneae, in Turkey, bear witness to the eradication of her name. Coins from Turkey have even been found with her name chiseled out, such was the enthusiasm to obliterate her from the face of history.

Juvenal was excoriatingly censorious, and must be partly responsible for the reception Messalina has received down the ages. Pliny the Elder, who was less cynical and possibly more objective, also had his part to play, as of course did Tacitus and Dio. Messalina was easy prey for Juvenal; to him, she was the *meretrix Augusta*, stealing out of the Imperial bedchamber, while Claudius slept, for a night on her back on a mat. According to Juvenal, she wore a hood and a blonde wig to conceal her familiar, recognisable black hair, and checked into her personal cell in a fetid brothel. There she prostituted herself, using the working name 'Lycisca' ('Wolf Bitch'). She stuck out her belly, indicating, 'The stomach you were in, noble Britannicus.' Juvenal states that Messalina was always the last of the girls to leave, staying until the very last minute, with 'her clitoris still burning and stiff with lust' ('*adhuc, ardens rigidae tentigine volvae*'); to Juvenal, the clitoral erection may have suggested evidence of Messalina's penis envy. She may have been worn out by the men, Juvenal records, but she still went home unsated, taking the stench of the brothel back to bed with her.¹⁵ In *Satire 10*, Juvenal revisits Messalina in a reference to her marriage to Silius and the 'Catch-22' decision he had to make: refuse the marriage and he would die, but to accept was also a death sentence.¹⁶ Pliny the Elder adds the unedifying story of Messalina's epic orgy, in which she challenged a prostitute to a twenty-four-hour sex marathon. The Empress won with a score of twenty-five partners—an average of just under one client per hour.¹⁷ The context in which this appears is an expatiation on the mating of animals, and Pliny's revelation that man is the only animal for which copulation is insatiable—Messalina's victory provides the evidence. Tacitus lists twelve of her distinguished equestrian lovers, who paid for their lust with their lives. Dio describes Messalina's group-sex sessions, attended by the husbands of the women involved; those who complied were rewarded, but those who declined to prostitute their wives were destroyed. Messalina concealed these orgies from Claudius by providing a ready supply of slave women for his bed.¹⁸

However, two contemporary works vindicate Messalina to a degree. In Seneca's *Octavia*, Venus is to blame for driving Messalina mad enough to conceive of her ludicrous plan to marry Silius, and for infuriating Claudius. In Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, the '*Pumpkinification*', it is Claudius who is the

focus of the satire—not least for forgetting that he had just had his wife murdered.¹⁹ And there lies part of the problem; later generations, including Tacitus, Pliny, and Juvenal, were intent on vilifying the Julio-Claudian regime. What better way to do this is there than the time-honoured tradition of attacking the Emperor through the sexual *mores* of his women? Their message is that if Claudius could barely keep his women in check, then he could not possibly have successfully ruled the Empire.²⁰

Messalina was always obsessed with her son, and by Agrippina's threat to his political progress. She was clumsy and naïve in the machinations she undertook to promote Britannicus, and she was driven partly by sex (*per lasciviam*), as her final relationship with Gaius Silius and her prodigious prostitution demonstrate.

Agrippina the Younger (AD 16–59) and Poppaea Sabina (AD 30–65)

Agrippina the Younger, daughter of Agrippina the Elder and Germanicus, survived the terror campaign of Tiberius along with her brother, Caligula, and her sister, Julia Drusilla. Julia Livilla, her other sister, died of starvation after Claudius recalled her from exile in AD 41, for adultery with Seneca the Younger.

Agrippina was born in AD 16 in Oppidum Ubiorum (near modern-day Cologne). She was a great-granddaughter of Augustus, great-niece and adoptive-great-granddaughter of Tiberius, and sister of Caligula. She was also the niece and fourth wife of the Emperor Claudius, and mother of the Emperor Nero. Pliny the Elder notes that she had a double set of canines in her right jaw—a rare dental condition but, being on the right, a sign of good omen.¹ Approximately 2 per cent of adults have supernumerary teeth. Apart from this, all we know of Agrippina's physical appearance is that she was attractive. Tacitus notes that she is beautiful (*forma*), in comparison with Julia Silana and Domitia Lepida; he rather spoils the picture by adding that she was as equally depraved as them. Dio describes her as beautiful (*kale*), while we also know that Nero—in a macabre post-mortem scene—found her corpse to be beautiful.² Her succession of lovers probably confirms that she was neither physically nor sexually unattractive. Agrippina was probably in good shape for most of her life; aged forty-three, and after a night's feasting, she was able to swim for her life in the March seas of the Bay of Naples when the attempt on her life ended in shipwreck.

Agrippina's early days were spent travelling with her parents, or in Rome with Antonia. It is difficult to know how the death of Germanicus affected the three-year-old; she travelled back to Brundisium in AD 19 at her grieving mother's side, arriving to a tumultuous yet mournful welcome. Thereafter, as with her siblings, she was educated by Livia, Antonia, and her mother in the Imperial household. In AD 28, on her thirteenth birthday, she was married off by Tiberius to her second cousin, the consul Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus (b. 17 BC). His mother was Antonia Major (b. 39 BC), a daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia Minor, making Domitius a great-nephew of Augustus, first cousin to Claudius, and second cousin to Agrippina and Caligula. His two sisters were Domitia Lepida the Elder and Domitia Lepida the Younger. The latter was the mother of the Empress Valeria Messalina, through her marriage to Mesalla Barbatus. Their son, also Mesalla Barbatus, was executed by Nero. Tacitus describes Domitia as being as wanton as Agrippina. Her wealth

included properties in Calabria and Fundi, and granaries in Puteoli. Her older sister, Domitia Lepida the Elder, was notorious for her meanness and her wealth; she owned estates in Ravenna, Rome, and Baiae, where she built fishponds that would later be described by Agrippina as a frivolous waste of money. Agrippina and Domitius set up their home near the fashionable Antium (modern-day Anzio).

Suetonius was contemptuous of Domitius, calling him 'loathsome in every way imaginable' (*'omni parte vitae detestabilis'*). This may have been a reflection of his disgust that Domitius fathered the evil that was Nero, but it is not difficult to see why Suetonius detested him. According to Suetonius's now-discredited allegations, Domitius's atrocities included murdering one of his freedmen who had refused to drink as much as he was ordered to. He also deliberately whipped up his horses and ran over a boy in a village on the Appian Way, and, in the Forum, knocked out the eye of an equestrian when the equestrian publicly criticized him. He was a notorious cheat, swindling bankers and (as Praetor) charioteers out of their prize money. He was also a serial womaniser; Tiberius charged him with treason, adultery, and incest with his sister, Domitia Lepida the Younger, but Caligula saved him.³

On succeeding Tiberius in AD 37, Caligula set about honouring his sisters, Agrippina, Drusilla, and Livilla. He accorded them some of the rights that were exclusive to the Vestal Virgins, including the privilege of sitting in the posh seats at the Games—Augustus had previously banished ordinary women to the 'gods'. Caligula minted coins showing images of himself and his sisters—at this point, a first in the history of numismatics. Caligula bestowed upon his sisters the rare distinction of adding their names to the annual Imperial vow of allegiance: 'I will not value my life or that of my children less highly than I do the safety of the Emperor and his sisters' (*neque me liberosque meos cariores habebō quam Gaium habebō et sorores eiū*). Even more constitutionally significant was Caligula's inclusion of them in the official declarations when tabling consular motions: 'Good fortune attend to the Emperor and his sisters' (*'quod bonum felixque sit C. Caesari sororibusque eius'*). It is irrelevant whether these honours showed a measure of familial *pietas* (or even equality) or whether they were a cynical attempt to win popularity. What is relevant, however, is how they amounted to an important elevation of women in the Imperial political machine. This was all done amidst a carnival atmosphere, in which the Roman people exulted over the end of the reign of Tiberius and the accession of a direct descendent of the ever-popular Germanicus. Agrippina herself would exploit the memory of Germanicus as a political expediency for the rest of her life. Agrippina's mother was rehabilitated; the *dies nefastus* marking her birthday was erased, and coins depicting her and Germanicus were minted.

The importance of the public relations implicit in the new seating arrangements at the games should not be underestimated. One of Agrippina's first outings would have been the opulent celebrations for Caligula's AD 37

completion of the Temple of Divus Augustus. Events included a horse race, run over two days, and the slaughter of 400 bears. The impact on the audience of seeing the three sisters, sitting at the front with the Vestal Virgins and other dignitaries, would have been huge—sending out the unequivocal message that these Imperial women were of great political and social importance.

On 15 December AD 37, Agrippina gave birth to a son—her only natural child. She called him Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, after her husband's recently-deceased father. Later, he would become better-known as Nero. Suetonius writes of numerous omens, the most significant of which was that the baby was bathed in a shaft of morning sunlight, even before his father could make the traditional symbolic gesture of touching him on the ground to symbolise his crucial connectivity with earth.⁴ Chaldean astronomers told Agrippina that Nero would one day be Emperor, but that he would also kill his mother; Agrippina replied, 'Let him kill her, just so long as he is Emperor' (*'ut imperaret matremque occideret; atque illa "occidat" inquit, "dum imperet"'*). The good fortune promised by the fortuitous shaft of sunlight was balanced out by the breech delivery that Agrippina endured, a sign of bad omen. Pliny the Elder wrote that breech deliveries were unnatural, and explains why babies born feet first are called Agrippa or Agrippina—they were born with difficulty (*aegre partus*).⁵ Marcus Agrippa was the only child thus born to come of any good, but even he was blighted by lameness and constant warring; worse, his legacy was the two Agrippinas, who left Caligula and Nero to the world. When Domitius was congratulated on the birth of his son, he ominously quipped that anything born to himself and Agrippina was bound to be a despicable danger to the public (*'detestabile et publico malo'*).⁶ At their son's baptism, Caligula offended Agrippina when he was invited to name the infant—he mischievously called him 'Claudius' after the future Emperor, who was then the laughing stock of the Imperial court.⁷

According to Suetonius, incest between Caligula and his sisters was a regular and public occurrence, even in the presence of his wife. Indeed, his grandmother, Antonia, once caught him in bed with Drusilla when they were staying at her house.⁸ The fact that neither Philo nor Seneca mention the incest—even when they were both hostile to Caligula, Seneca especially critical on moral grounds—casts some doubt on its veracity.

The summer of love ended abruptly in September, when Caligula fell seriously ill. He recovered, but psychologically he was never quite the same again. The illness prompted those around Caligula to make provisions for a possible successor; Caligula later misinterpreted this and disposed of Tiberius Gemellus, who had been Tiberius's co-heir with Caligula and whom Caligula had adopted on his succession. He then dealt with Marcus Junius Silanus, his father-in-law, who was forced to cut his own throat. Gemellus was beheaded on the grounds that he had insulted Caligula by taking an antidote against poison; it was, in fact, a medicine he was taking for a persistent cough.

Caligula had married Junia Claudilla in AD 33, but she died in childbirth

the following year. He then seduced Ennia Naevia, the wife of Macro, the commander of the Praetorian Guard and an ally. He promised, in writing, that he would marry her when he became Emperor; this no doubt accounts for the assistance he received when he murdered Tiberius. In AD 37, heightened concerns about his succession may have prompted Caligula's marriage to Livia Orestilla (or Cornelia Orestina, according to Dio); they soon separated on the grounds of her infertility.⁹ His cavalier attitude towards women had implications for Agrippina, as it had for any women who had the misfortune to stray into his orbit; it explains, or perhaps is a result of, his alleged incestuous relations. In *Caligula*, Suetonius records that he actually appropriated Livia Orestilla at her wedding to Gaius Piso, carting her off (Sabine-women-style) to his palace; two years after her peremptory dismissal, he banished her for allegedly returning to Piso. The rich and beautiful Lollia Paulina was his next victim; he was attracted to her because someone happened to mention that Lollia's grandmother had been beautiful. Caligula made her divorce her husband, Publius Memmius Regulus, who was consul in AD 31. Six months later he divorced her, again because she was supposedly barren; he then sentenced her to eternal celibacy, forbidding her to sleep with any other man. Caligula married Milonia Caesonia in AD 39; Suetonius says that she was neither beautiful nor young, but she was fertile, having had three children from a previous marriage.¹⁰ She was extravagant and louche—but Caligula loved her, showing her off before his troops, dressed up in combat uniform and a shield. He even made her parade, naked, before his friends. Caesonia gave birth to their daughter, Julia Drusilla, one month after their wedding—he refused to call Caesonia his wife until she had given birth. Julia was entrusted to Minerva for her education; Caligula never had any doubts that she was his child, as her violent temper and habit of trying to scratch out the eyes of her friends convinced him of his paternity.

In AD 38 Drusilla, Caligula's sister, died of a fever. She had been Caligula's favourite sister, and her death hit him badly. He had even bequeathed all of his property (including the Empire) to her once, when he had been dangerously ill. Caligula's first response to her death was to deify her, establishing a college of twenty priests under her name and setting up golden statues. This was the first time a woman had been deified—another stage in the elevation of Imperial women, drawing them just a little bit closer to the status enjoyed by men. Suetonius records how, during the period of mourning, it was a capital offence to bathe, laugh, or dine with one's parents or children. One night Caligula was so grief-stricken that he suddenly left Rome, drove through Campania, and sailed to Sicily.

Hereafter, his attitude towards Livilla and Agrippina cooled markedly; Caligula was replaced in their beds by his catamite friends. In AD 39 the two sisters devised a plot to assassinate him, with the help of Drusilla's widower and their cousin, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. This became known as 'The Plot of the Three Daggers'. The decision of the two sisters to risk everything, in

what was obviously going to be a life-changing gamble, is difficult to understand. The objective was to replace Caligula with Lepidus. Drusilla had married Lucius Cassius Longinus in AD 33, but Caligula forced them to divorce so that Drusilla could marry Lepidus; at the same time, Caligula was treating Drusilla as if she was his wife. The match had brought Lepidus close to Caligula and his family, and after Gemellus died in AD 37 Caligula considered Lepidus to be his heir. It seems likely that Agrippina saw an opportunity in Lepidus to advance the claims of her son, Nero, and so initiated an affair with him. Tacitus describes the reason for the liaison as ‘in the hope of obtaining power’ (*‘spe dominationis’*); it was the first of many instances where Agrippina would use sex as a means to a political end.¹⁰ It is unlikely that both sisters could have benefitted from the putsch, so while we can see how Agrippina might have gained from it, there is little to suggest any viable benefit for Livilla. Perhaps the repellent treatment they had received from their brother, and latterly from his catamite friends, was enough to make Livilla want to kill him.

The plot failed, and the three conspirators were accused of incest. At Lepidus’s trial, Caligula denounced Agrippina and Livilla and produced spurious letters, supposedly written by them, revealing their plans for murder. Lepidus was executed by having his throat cut, while the two sisters were exiled to the Pontian Islands, Pontia and Pandateria—the third generation of Imperial women to be punished in this way. Agrippina and Livilla would have received no comfort from the threatening message Caligula sent them: a reminder that he had swords as well as islands. Their possessions, slaves, and freedmen were sold off by Caligula during a trip to Gaul; this was apparently a logistical nightmare because of the staggering amount of property involved. So great was the strain on Roman transportation that the bread supply for Rome was interrupted for a period. Agrippina received the bones of Lepidus in an urn. Caligula sent three daggers to the Temple of Mars the Avenger, to celebrate Lepidus’s death—the three daggers which were supposedly destined to kill him. Vespasian, the future Emperor, carried a motion in the Senate that the bones of Lepidus should be dumped instead of buried. Vespasian’s actions here served to incur the hatred of Agrippina, who may have been responsible for his noticeably low profile during her years of power. Nero, meanwhile, was living with his aunt, Domitia Lepida the Younger; Caligula confiscated his inheritance. The kindness Domitia showed Nero was another cause of festering resentment in Agrippina. To further complicate matters for her, in AD 40 Domitius died of oedema at Pyrgi, an old Etruscan port and Roman colony.

However, Caligula did not survive for long. He, Milonia Caesonia, and their daughter, Julia Drusilla, were slaughtered outside the theatre they were attending in January AD 41, in a conspiracy led by Cassius Chaerea. Julia’s brains were dashed out. Agrippina’s uncle, Claudius (brother of her father, Germanicus), was made the next Emperor of Rome. Claudius recalled

Agrippina and Livilla from exile. In an act of politically-motivated *pietas*, they exhumed Caligula's half-burnt body from its shallow grave in the Lamian Gardens, on the Esquiline, re-cremated it, and entombed it. Before this, the gardens were known to be haunted by Caligula's ghost, which emerged each night just before something terrible occurred at the scene of his murder.¹¹ The Senate naïvely believed that the Republic had been restored; they were soon disabused of this fantasy when Claudius began to take control, the Praetorian Guard was voted donations, and Chaerea was executed.

Two other men who had come under suspicion after the attempted coup were the prodigiously cruel Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, Ofonius Tigellinus (c. AD 10–69), and Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC–AD 65). Like Lepidus, both also shared the dubious distinction of allegedly conducting affairs with Agrippina (in AD 58) and Livilla (in AD 41), for which Seneca had been exiled by Claudius to Corsica. In AD 39 Tigellinus was banished, having been found guilty of adultery with Agrippina and Livilla. Two years later, he was recalled by Claudius. To further complicate matters, Tigellinus is also alleged to have had affairs with Domitius and Marcus Vinicius—the husbands of the two princesses.

According to Suetonius one of Agrippina's first actions was to try and seduce the noble and wealthy Servius Sulpicius Galba, the future Emperor, and draw him away from his wife, Aemilia Lepida:

But no match could tempt him; not even Agrippina, who blatantly went for Galba even though her husband had recently died and Lepida was still alive at the time. Lepida's mother rebuked her in front of a crowd of *matronae*, even going so far as to slap her.¹²

Galba's dynastic credentials were impeccable, and just in case anyone doubted this he carried around a copy of his family tree, going right back to Jupiter. Livia Drusilla had become a good friend of his, leaving him 50 million sesterces in her will.¹³

Deterred from Galba, in AD 41 Agrippina married the wealthy, bookish, and witty Gaius Sallustius Passienus Crispus—Agrippina's brother-in-law through his marriage to Domitia Lepida, and a distant relative of the first century BC historian Sallust. Sallustius was made to divorce Domitia Lepida to make way for Agrippina, and when he died in around AD 48 he left Agrippina a wealthy woman. The predictable rumours were that Agrippina poisoned Sallustius to get his money.

Agrippina kept a discreet distance from the Imperial household during these times, avoiding Messalina, Claudius's wife and her second cousin. She observed what Messalina did to her sister; she accused Livilla of adultery, and Livilla died soon afterwards through enforced starvation. Seneca was recalled from Corsica in AD 49 by Agrippina, to help her curry favour with the populace and to provide a tutor for Nero.

Messalina clearly saw Nero as competition for Britannicus in the

succession, and accordingly attempted to remove him; as we have seen the botched attempt at assassination was the dead snake incident, while Nero's popularity at the AD 47 Secular Games can only have strengthened Messalina's resolve. Agrippina was becoming a favourite of the people, gaining sympathy from them for her troubled life. The memoirs she wrote, recording her family's misfortunes and an account of her mother's life, may also have increased her celebrity status and popularity.

In the meantime, Agrippina was allegedly conducting an affair with Marcus Antonius Pallas (b. c. AD 1), a former slave of Antonia Minor. He was now another of Claudius's freedmen advisors, and was in charge of the treasury (a *rationibus*). Apart from influencing both Claudius and Agrippina, Pallas initiated the law which allowed a freewoman who married a slave to keep her freedom (so long as the slave's master agreed), a law for which he received much acclaim. Narcissus, however, was planning to cause Agrippina's downfall by revealing her affair with Pallas. Narcissus had joined forces with Britannicus, Nero's rival for the succession. On becoming Emperor, Nero had Narcissus arrested and executed.

Things came to a head between Agrippina and Narcissus in the Fucine Lake Affair, an ambitious public-works land-reclamation scheme in central Italy, which was intended to reduce local flooding and create new farmland by driving a 5-km tunnel through Mount Salvio, to link with the River Liris. Over the space of eleven years, 30,000 men laboured on the project under the management of Narcissus, until it was completed in AD 52. The grand opening was attended by Claudius, Nero, and Agrippina, who was wearing a distinctly regal-looking golden dress. Pliny the Elder was also there to witness a mock naval battle involving 19,000 soldiers and sailors, matched by thousands of spectators. Dio suggests that the battle was 'mock' in more than one respect:

First they assembled in a single body and all together addressed Claudius thus: 'Hail, Emperor! We who are about to die salute thee.' And when this failed to save them and they were ordered to fight just the same, they simply sailed through their opponents' lines, injuring each other as little as possible. This continued until they were forced to kill one another.¹⁴

Unfortunately for Narcissus, the Fucine Lake was a public relations disaster, and it was a humiliating experience for the Imperial entourage. The channel had not been dug nearly deep enough, and so only produced a feeble trickle instead of the expected torrent. More digging hurriedly took place, and the second opening was celebrated with gladiatorial contests and a lavish banquet; this time, the deluge that was unleashed nearly drowned Claudius and the rest of the Imperial party. Tacitus records that Agrippina subsequently charged Narcissus with embezzlement.¹⁵ He responded by trotting out the predictable accusations of 'woman-like lack of restraint' (*inpotentiam muliebrem*) and 'over-ambition' (*nimias spes*). Narcissus's days of influence were numbered.

According to Tacitus, the slaying of Messalina by her husband's soldiers threw the Imperial household into chaos—not least over the likely identity of Claudius's next wife, his fourth.¹⁶ Claudius vowed to remain celibate after the Messalina bigamy fiasco, even promising his guards (presumably with tongue-in-cheek) that they would have to kill him if he broke his word. That, of course, did not happen, but he did have the law changed to allow uncles to marry nieces—paving the way for him to marry Agrippina, a relationship which, until the timely change in the law, was blatantly incestuous. The scandal was made worse by Claudius's inappropriate references to his new bride as his daughter and foster-child, born and bred in his lap. To Tacitus, the union represented the acme of Agrippina's depravity; in the *Octavia*, attributed to Seneca, the nurse describes the Imperial marriage bed as the font of all evil, and their marriage as illegal and lamentable.¹⁷

The intensely competitive contenders for the hand of Claudius were Lollia Paulina (promoted by the wealthy freedman Gaius Julius Callistus, secretary responsible for justice and law) and Agrippina (supported by Pallas). Narcissus backed Aelia Paetina, who had already been Claudius's second wife.¹⁸ Tacitus records that Agrippina, described as 'unyielding in her hatred' (*'atrox odii'*), abhorred Paulina, showing her nothing but odium and hostility.¹⁹ In AD 49, soon after her wedding to Claudius, Agrippina had Paulina arrested on spurious charges of witchcraft—more specifically, consorting with Chaldean astrologers and magicians, and consulting the oracle of Apollo at Colophon about the recent marriage. Despite a sham eulogy on her fine lineage by Claudius, her property and most of her wealth was summarily confiscated and she was exiled. Claudius was made to believe that she was a public danger (*perniciosa*), and that her potential for criminal activity had to be expunged. Paulina was later forced to commit suicide, on Agrippina's orders; she must have taken something of a beating as well, because when her head was brought back to Rome Agrippina could only identify it by inspecting her dentition—which presumably had identifiable abnormalities like her own. Paulina had enjoyed something of a reputation for extravagance and ostentation; Pliny the Elder records how she wore the best part of her inheritance to a dinner party one night, decked out, Cleopatra-like, in 40 million sesterces worth of jewels. In case anyone doubted the value of her jewelry, she made sure to carry the receipts with her for inspection.²⁰ At around the same time, another noble woman (*inlustris femina*), Calpurnia, was exiled for ten years because Claudius offended Agrippina when he praised her beauty. Agrippina only stopped short of having her executed when she realised that Claudius had no serious designs on her.

Aelia Paetina, the wealthy owner of a pottery, had married Claudius in AD 28, and in AD 30 their only child was born: Claudia Antonia. By AD 38 Claudius had divorced Paetina for 'slighter offences' (*'levibus offensis'*)—significantly 'slighter' than the offences of scandalous unchastity and suspected murder committed by his first wife, Plautia Urgulanilla, whom he

had married in AD 9. Her daughter, Claudia, was born five months after her divorce from Claudius; she was the illegitimate daughter of Claudius's freedman, Boter. Claudius repudiated the baby and left her, naked, on Urgulanilla's doorstep. Their son, Drusus, was betrothed to one of the daughters of Sejanus, but he died in a tragic accident; he choked on a pear which he had playfully thrown up in the air and caught in his mouth. We have seen how yet more scandal followed in AD 24, when Urgulanilla's brother, Plautius Silvana, threw his wife, Apronia, out of a window to her death. Urgulanilla was the granddaughter of Urgulania, Livia Drusilla's friend.²¹ She was preceded by two failed betrothals: the first was to Aemilia Lepida, which broke off after he mother, Julia the Younger, was disgraced in AD 8; the second was to Livia Medullina, who died on her wedding day.

Tacitus records that Agrippina made use of her charms (*inlicebrae*) to seduce Claudius. Her position as a niece allowed her an intimacy in which the lines between avuncular affection and sexual gratification were very blurred. Suetonius tells of the kisses and caresses she deployed to impassion Claudius; more crucially, however, Claudius would have seen that Agrippina brought political benefits. She had ancestries in both the Julian and Claudian dynasties—the former through her mother, and the latter through her father, the ever-popular Germanicus, who was grandfather to Nero. Marriage to Agrippina would clearly eliminate the Julio-Claudian rivalry, and make his regime more palatable to the troublemakers in the Senate.

Agrippina eventually prevailed, and Claudius married her on 1 January AD 49—after the sycophantic Lucius Vitellius the Elder had secured a vote in the Senate recommending that Claudius marry again. According to Tacitus the union between Claudius and Agrippina was confirmed by 'rumour and by their illicit love' (*pactum inter Claudium et Agrippinam matrimonium iam fama, iam amore inlicito firmabatur*).²² Vitellius argued that Agrippina had all the credentials for an Imperial wife. She could look after Claudius's 'domestic concerns' ('*domestica cura*'), and be his 'companion in good times and bad, in whom he could confide his most intimate thoughts and to whom he could entrust his little children' ('*prosperis dubiisque sociam, cui cogitationes intimas, cui parvos liberos tradat*'). Agrippina, he went on, had a fine and famous lineage; she was fertile and she was morally impeccable, the perfect *matrona*. Vitellius won the day, the law against incest was amended (the scandalous amendment was not repealed until AD 342), and the couple married, with great celebration amongst the fickle senators.

Both Suetonius and Tacitus refer to the malleability and subservience of Claudius in the hands of his previous wives and freedmen. This was a weakness that Agrippina did not fail to observe, and she laid her plans accordingly.²³ It may have been a factor in some of the high-profile executions and suicides involving his family; they included Appius Silanus, his father-in-law; Julia, daughter of Tiberius's son Drusus; Julia, daughter of his brother, Germanicus; and Gnaeus Pompey, his son-in-law through his marriage to

Antonia, who was stabbed while in bed with a catamite. Altogether, thirty-five senators and up to 300 equestrians lost their lives. However, the vast majority of these deaths and enforced suicides occurred during Claudius's marriage to Messalina; the numbers dropped off considerably during his marriage to Agrippina. This, along with a marked improvement in relations with the Senate, seems to suggest that Agrippina's shrewd involvement in policy-making had a beneficial and steadying effect on the general political climate.

For Dio, Agrippina simply had Claudius where she wanted him. For Tacitus, their marriage was pivotal as it apparently changed the whole nature of the Roman state: in effect, everyone now obeyed a woman; she did not make a laughing stock of the state through her lubriciousness (*lascivia*), as was the case with Messalina, but did rather worse by imposing a masculine kind of servitude (*quasi virile servitium*). Yet again we see powerful qualities in a woman interpreted as male characteristics. In public, Agrippina was strict and somewhat superior (*palam severitas ac saepius superbia*), but privately she was chaste (*nihil impudica*)—unless she could use *impudicitia* as a shortcut to power. She was extremely venal, on the pretext that the accumulation of wealth was necessary to support her reign.

The attempts of Claudius to make incest respectable by changing the law, then later punishing Silanus and Junia Lepida for the same offence, were seen as hypocritical and risible. Agrippina, however, was much more circumspect and conscious of her reputation. So that she would not be judged solely by her malicious outrages, in AD 49 she recalled Seneca the Younger from exile as a public relations exercise. Most people would see the benefits to the state having such a sagacious man back in Rome, even if a reluctant Claudius did not. Moreover, Seneca was appointed as a tutor for Nero and became an ally for Agrippina—reminiscent of her beneficence to him (*memoria beneficij*). Furthermore, Seneca would be useful in helping to formulate policy for the new regime. Nero's existing tutors, Alexander Aegus and Chaeremon of Alexandria, were of the highest calibre—but they were philosophers, and philosophy was not considered a rigorous enough discipline to feature in the best *cursus honorum*, particularly for a potential Emperor. Cornelia, Seneca, and, later, Julia Procilla (mother of Agricola) all had their doubts about the usefulness of philosophy to leaders of men. The Agrippina-Seneca relationship sparked accusations of an affair in AD 58, when a liaison was suggested by the arch-*delator* (informer) Publius Suillius. Nero's other tutors, Beryllus and Anicetus, were also let go, even though Nero obviously liked them; he later made Beryllus his secretary for Greek correspondence, and made Anicetus prefect of the prestigious Misenum fleet.

Agrippina's priority was always to secure the succession for Nero. The way forward was for Nero to marry Claudia Octavia, Claudius's daughter by Nero. However, the eight-year-old Octavia was already promised to the preeminent and eligible Lucius Junius Silanus Torquatus. Accordingly, Agrippina concluded that she had little choice but to remove Torquatus from

the scene—permanently. She colluded with the ambitious Vitellius to slander Silanus with suggestions with his sister, Junia, who, according to Tacitus, was attractive, but a bit of a loose cannon' (*'sane decora et procax'*). Seneca, in his satirical *Apocolocyntosis Claudii*, calls her 'a party girl' (*'festivissima'*). Mud sticks, particularly when (as Tacitus reminds us) there is such an impressionable Emperor as Claudius in charge. Claudius terminated the betrothal, exiled Junia, and removed Silanus from office. He was forced to commit suicide on the day of Claudius's wedding to Agrippina.²⁴

Dio records that Agrippina now confined Britannicus to virtual house arrest. She slew Sosibius, his tutor, for alleged treason:

...she handed Britannicus over to those who suited her purpose and did him all the harm she could. She would allow him neither to be with his father nor to appear in public.... When the prefects Crispinus and Lusius Geta would not yield to her in everything, she removed them from office... No one attempted in any way to check Agrippina; indeed, she had more power than Claudius himself.... She possessed all power, since she dominated Claudius and had won over Narcissus and Pallas.²⁵

Soon afterwards, Octavia was betrothed to Nero—a union which was proposed on the ominous promise that it would lead to 'greater things'. Nero was now a significant rival to Britannicus.

The next scheme was to have Nero legally adopted by Claudius. Agrippina achieved this with the support of Pallas, who reminded the vulnerable Emperor of his obligation to the public interest and of the precedents set by Augustus, when he adopted his stepsons, and of Germanicus, when he was adopted by Tiberius. Nero accordingly joined the Imperial family, leap-frogging over Britannicus, who was now ostensibly acting as his protector.²⁶ As Nero rose, so Britannicus fell. He soon became cynical of his stepmother's flagrant duplicity, but he was powerless to react. Nero was prematurely allowed the dress of manhood, the *toga virilis*, while Britannicus remained attired as a youth. Claudius was persuaded by the Senate to allow Nero the consulship at the precocious age of twenty, and to allow him to have pro-consular authority outside Rome with the title of 'Prince of the Roman Youth' (*'princeps iuventutis'*). Gifts to the military and the people were offered in Nero's name. Games were also staged to win him popularity, at which Britannicus wore the dress of boyhood (the *praetexta*) while Nero sported a triumphal robe; the way things were going was clear to anyone who cared to look. Britannicus's sympathisers were removed, some on spurious charges. Agrippina was particularly outraged and vindictive when she learnt of an encounter between Nero and Britannicus; Nero had greeted Britannicus with his name, but he was greeted in return as Domitius, his former name. Agrippina complained to Claudius, bitterly spinning it that Britannicus was contemptuous of Nero's adoption; she claimed that if his malice was unchecked it would end in the ruin of the state. Claudius was

enraged and immediately banished or executed all of Britannicus's tutors, replacing them with Agrippina's appointees.²⁷

The honours bestowed upon and appropriated by Agrippina came thick and fast. Precedents were set, and she soon established a power base the like of which was unheard of in the history of Rome—setting the bar for future Empresses. Firstly, in AD 50 Agrippina had a *colonia* established and named after her at Ara Ubiorum, her birthplace— *Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensis*, or *Agrippinensium*, the only Roman colony to be named after a Roman woman. The *colonia* here was a particularly successful example of Claudius's policy of spreading Roman influence and beneficence throughout his empire; the reciprocal political and military benefits would have redounded to Agrippina's credit, inextricably associating her politically with Claudius in far-flung Germania. Agrippina was granted the honorific title of 'Augusta', making her official name 'Julia Augusta Agrippina'. This was another first—Agrippina was the first wife of a living Emperor to be honoured in this way. The significance of Agrippina's unprecedented title was that she was now recognised as an integral part of the Claudian administration. Livia had previously received the title as a widow, and Antonia was Caligula's grandmother when she received it. After Agrippina, Poppaea became Augusta as the wife of Nero in AD 63; the title became standard for Emperor's wives from the reign of Domitian onwards.

In AD 51, Agrippina was granted the rare honour of riding in a *carpentum*, a privilege reserved for Vestal Virgins and only enjoyed by Messalina (temporarily) and Livia Drusilla in the past. Agrippina safely installed Sextus Afranius Burrus as head of the Praetorian Guard. She also persuaded Claudius (by threats) to spare Vitellius when he was accused of treason and plotting to take the throne; Vitellius was merely outlawed, rather than executed.²⁸ She was now permitted to take part in the Emperor's morning *salutatio*, a highly-visible, influential, public and political duty that had never before been officially permitted to a woman—although Livia had hijacked the function during the reign of Tiberius.

Busts of Agrippina started to appear with Agrippina wearing a diadem, an adornment hitherto reserved for goddesses and deceased mortals. A number of coins were minted bearing her image; a denarius minted in the early AD 50s depicts her with Nero as AGRIPPINAE AVGVSTAE, wearing a crown of corn-ears and her hair in a long plait. Others show associations with Ceres, Persephone, Cybele, and Artemis. Poppies, corn, and fruit are frequently visible, all promoting Agrippina's representation of fertility and her growing public prominence. Her appearance on a gold coin in AD 49 was the first time an Imperial woman had been featured in gold. In Aphrodisias, she appeared prominently on the Sebasteion Temple, a celebration of Roman Emperors; here, she is seen holding hands with Claudius to promote their marital harmony. She is also depicted crowning Nero with laurel—a sure sign, to some, that he was destined to be Emperor. Her presence here is also a visible

demonstration that Imperial women (as mothers, wives, or sisters) had become pivotal players in the succession of Emperors. Livia and Julia had started it all off, and Agrippina was working hard to continue the trend. Even though they were still subordinate to the Emperor, Imperial women had become a force to be reckoned with.

Agrippina's enthusiastic forays into foreign politics included the sponsorship of games in Adalia (in the Gulf of Antalya, Turkey) and Mytilene. In Judea, she wielded her personal power and influence to settle a serious uprising. Judea had been ruled by Herod Agrippa—friend to Caligula and Claudius—and had enjoyed autonomy until Herod's death in AD 44, when it reverted to a province—much to the chagrin of the Judeans. A riot broke out when a Roman soldier, guarding the temple precinct, sacrilegiously mooned and insultingly broke wind at Jewish worshippers celebrating the Passover; as many as 30,000 people died in the subsequent fighting. Even more seriously, in AD 51 a revolt sprang up in the country after a group of Galilean pilgrims were murdered by a band of Samaritans; the Roman procurator, Ventidius Cumanus, sided with the aggressors. The situation was complicated by the involvement of Felix, brother of Pallas and procurator of Samaria, a position he no doubt gained with the help of Agrippina. According to Josephus, the governor of Syria, Ummidius Quadratus, held two inquests, after which a number of Jews and Samaritans were beheaded; he then passed the intractable issue over to Claudius. Claudius came down on the side of the Samaritans, but Herod's successor, Agrippa II, appealed to his friend Agrippina; she managed to persuade Claudius to take a different view, which was more sympathetic to the Jews. Three Samaritans were executed, and Cumanus was exiled for maladministration; Felix took over as procurator of Judea, the first freedman to attain such a senior provincial post. Felix repaid the debt to Agrippina, in part, by minting coins in her honour.²⁹

That same year, Caratacus, the veteran British chieftain and King of the Catuvellauni, led the Silures and Ordovices against Publius Ostorius Scapula. Scapula eventually defeated Caratacus, capturing his wife and daughter and taking his brothers prisoner. Caratacus himself fled to the Brigantes; unfortunately for him, the queen, Cartimandua, had him bound in chains and handed over to the Romans. Caratacus's reputation preceded him, with Roman citizens anxious to see the man who had defied Rome for so long. His dignified speech saved his life; Claudius pardoned him, his wife, his daughter, and his brothers. Significantly, Agrippina had seated herself on the dais, on a chair next to Claudius, and Caratacus paid her the same respect and homage he paid to the Emperor—thinking nothing of the fact that a woman had equal authority with the Emperor of Rome. This might not be surprising, considering female chieftains were not unusual in Caratacus's country, with examples including Cartimandua and Boudica. What is remarkable, however, is Agrippina's audacity and her unprecedented position on the platform before the Roman military standards, assuming joint power with the Emperor.³⁰ Both

Dio and Tacitus gasp at the impudence of it all.

Agrippina moved next against the commanders of the Praetorian Guard, Lusius Geta and Rufrius Crispinus, whom she considered to be devoted to the memory of Messalina and her children (notably Britannicus). Agrippina successfully convinced Claudius that the guards' own mutual rivalry was divisive, and detrimental to the Guard; they were accordingly replaced by Sextus Afranius Burrus. Burrus was never allowed to forget who raised him to that position.³¹ When Agrippina's old accomplice, Lucius Vitellius, was accused of treason (*maiestas*) and plotting to overthrow Claudius, Agrippina had the accuser, Junius Lupus, outlawed—even though Claudius had initially been happy to prosecute Vitellius. In AD 53 Agrippina took a liking to the splendid gardens of Titus Statilius Taurus, so, to acquire them, she ruined Taurus by having Tarquitiu Priscus bring false charges of extortion and magic against him. Taurus took his own life.

However, the Senate was beginning to have reservations about Agrippina's power. To mark their concern and by way of a warning, they dismissed Tarquitiu Priscus from the army. According to Tacitus, this is when things started to go wrong for Agrippina.³²

AD 54 was a bad year for the omens. Tacitus records how a blood-raining comet was seen (often a warning of the death of a king or queen), and standards and tents burst into spontaneous flame, struck by lightning. Bees swarmed around the pedestal of the Capitol, children were born half-human and half-beast, and a pig was born with the claws of a hawk. Every official office suffered a death: one quaestor, one aedile, one tribune, one praetor, and one consul died. In the same year, it was recorded by Phlegon that a Syrian woman in Mevania in Agrippina's service turned into a man the night before her wedding.³³ However, what scared Agrippina the most was when a drunken Claudius tactlessly let slip that it was his fate to suffer his wife's shameful acts (*flagitia*), and then to punish her. Tacitus records it as '*fatale sibi ut coniugum flagitia ferret*', 'it's my fate to suffer my wife's fornication' whereas Suetonius neatly transcribes it as, 'All my marriages were unchaste, but not all were unchecked' ('*omnia impudica, sed non impunita matrimonia*'). Frightened by this, Agrippina resolved to act quickly.³⁴

Agrippina's womanly jealousy (*muliebris causa*) drove her to murder Domitia Lepida—sister of Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, mother of Messalina, and grandmother of Britannicus. Domitia unwisely considered herself to be as much of a celebrity as Agrippina and, as Tacitus states, little separated the two in terms of beauty, age, or wealth (*forma aetas opes*). Indeed, they were both notoriously immoral and violent women (*impudica, infamis*). The burning issue, however, was their competition with each other over Nero; Lepida tried blandishments and indulgence to win him over, while Agrippina was harsh and threatening (*trux* and *minax*).³⁵ Lepida had to be disposed of, for womanly reasons (*muliebribus causis*)—she was charged with the attempted murder of Agrippina through magic, and with keeping

unruly slave gangs in Calabria. She was sentenced to death. Narcissus, ever the champion of Britannicus, looked on in horror, seeing Agrippina as more repellent now than Messalina ever was: she was totally without honour, modesty, and chastity. He retired to Sinuessa through ill health.

Now Agrippina saw her chance to murder Claudius; the only question that remained was the type of poison to be used. She was concerned that Claudius might recant on his deathbed and rehabilitate Britannicus if a slow-working poison was used; but she was also aware that an aggressive toxin would be incriminating. She compromised, choosing a venom that would drive Claudius insane before delivering a slow death. Locusta, a lady proficient in pharmacology and with a conviction hanging over her head for poisoning (*veneficii damnata*), was enlisted, and the poison was prepared. It was to be delivered by a eunuch, Halotus, who was a regular dish-taster. Tacitus says that a particularly juicy mushroom was smeared with the poison, but it failed to have its effect.³⁶ A terrified Agrippina called in the Emperor's physician, Gaius Stertinius Xenophon, who was in on the plot; he put a poisoned feather down Claudius's throat, in a pretended attempt to make him vomit. Suetonius also describes the mushroom theory, writing that Nero later ironically quoted the Greek proverb which describes mushrooms as the 'food of the gods' (*'cibus deorum'*). What exactly killed Claudius is open to speculation; fungi, of course, are unpredictable things, and it may be that Claudius died of an accidental poisoning, malaria, or even natural causes.

On the death of Claudius, Agrippina made a sly show of grief-stricken comfort towards the bereft Britannicus. In a bid to emulate her grandmother, Livia, Agrippina backed divine honours for Claudius. She organised a funeral reminiscent of that arranged for Augustus by Livia.³⁷ Nero, her sixteen-year-old son, then emerged from the Imperial palace as Emperor.

The Pretorian Guard was bribed, and reprisals followed against Agrippina's enemies. Her first victim was Marcus Junius Silanus, governor of Asia, poisoned independently without Nero's knowledge or consent. Agrippina saw Silanus as a potential rival to her son, possibly intent on avenging Agrippina's murder of his brother. Narcissus followed; he was tortured, mercilessly, into committing suicide. Narcissus had been careful to take all the letters containing secret information against Agrippina and others with him, all of which he burned before his death. Coincidentally, he was murdered near the tomb of Messalina; to Dio 'it seemed to be in fulfilment of her vengeance'. More bloodshed was prevented by the influence of Sextus Afranius Burrus and Seneca; Burrus guided Nero in military affairs, while Seneca was, of course, his tutor. Both were up against 'the ferocity of Agrippina, fired by the desire of malicious power' (*'certamen utrique unum erat contra ferociam Agrippinae, quae cunctis malae dominationis cupidinibus flagrans'*).³⁸

Her power and reputation as a powerful Empress knew no bounds. Dio stated:

At first Agrippina managed for him all the business of the empire; and she and her son went forth together, often reclining in the same litter.... She also received the various embassies and sent letters to people and governors and kings.³⁹

Nero—perhaps facetiously—would use the password ‘*Optima Mater*’ (‘The Best of Mothers’) when asked for a pass by the guards. The Senate voted Agrippina two lictors (even the chief Vestal Virgin only had one), and exalted her to priestess (*flamenica*) of the deified Claudius. She tried to block new changes to Claudian legislation, and had a door built at the rear of the palace so that she could stand behind a curtain and eavesdrop on Senatorial proceedings—the Senate being a no-go area for women of any status. This was tangible evidence of the movement of government business from the Senate house to the Palatine. Agrippina effectively attended sessions of the Senate—the first woman in Roman history to do so. Precedents were also set in coinage, when she was shown facing Nero as Agrippa Augusta, wife of the deified Claudius and mother of Caesar—a triple-boost for her image, suggesting her status as co-regent with Nero. When an Armenian delegation pleaded before Nero, she was on the point of taking a seat beside the Emperor—to everyone’s astonishment—as she had done in the Caratacus incident. The situation was only saved by Seneca’s diplomatic intervention. Nero must have watched all this with some concern, particularly as he was getting a bit of a reputation for being under the influence of a woman. Searching questions were being asked of the seventeen-year-old during the Armenian crisis: how was someone so young, who was ruled by a woman and controlled by his tutors, going to make a difference to anything?⁴⁰

For someone Nero’s age, the overbearing presence and meddlesome activities of his mother—however great his gratitude for her getting him to where he was—were always going to irritate and annoy. The ensuing fractiousness between Nero and Agrippina is, of course, eerily reminiscent of the factious relationship between Tiberius and Livia. An example of early conflict and contrariness came with Agrippina’s attitude towards Nero’s prodigality; she remonstrated with her son over the 10 million sesterces he gave to his freedman Doryphorus, and heaped up a pile of the same amount in front of him. Nero apologised, admitted that it was obviously not enough, and promptly doubled the amount.

A freedwoman called Claudia Acte became the catalyst for the irrevocable rift between Nero and his mother. Nero much preferred this young girl, who satisfied his adulterous desires, to his noble and virtuous wife Octavia, whom he now abhorred. At the same time, two fashionable young men-about-town insinuated themselves into Nero’s life—Marcus Salvius Otho (the future Emperor) and Claudius Senecio. Tacitus tells us that when Agrippina found out about Acte, she (predictably) raged as only a woman or a mother can, incensed at having to compete with a former slave girl (*liberta aemulae*) and

at the prospect of having a maid as her daughter-in-law (*nurus ancilla*).⁴¹ The nastier his mother's reproaches, the more Nero burned with love for Acte, until the power of that love began to turn him against Agrippina. He took solace in Seneca and Annaeus Serenus, who had been complicit in Nero's affair from the start—even to the extent that Serenus had posed as Acte's lover, in order to divert suspicion. Nero was so besotted with Acte that at some point during their three-year affair he expressed a desire to marry her; he had a family tree fabricated which showed how her ancestry was linked with King Attalus of Pergamum, and he bribed some ex-consuls to swear to her royal birthright.⁴²

Agrippina soon realised the futility of her tactics, and adopted a more indulgent and generous approach. She offered Nero and Acte the use of her bedroom, plied him with gifts, and admitted that her earlier severity had been intemperate. Tacitus goes on to tell how Nero was not fooled by this mood swing, and his friends warned him to 'beware the intrigues of this ever-cruel and now-duplicitous woman' (*'cavere insidias mulieris semper atrocis, tum et falsae'*). Accordingly, he adopted the strategy of curbing his mother's power indirectly. When Pallas was removed from office, Agrippina flew into her predictable, menacing rage; desperately (and somewhat implausibly) she claimed that Britannicus, now of age, was the rightful heir to Claudius, and that Nero was an adopted intruder who was using Britannicus to hurt her. Her veiled threat was that she could expose the whole story of that unhappy dynasty, including that of her first marriage and her poisoning of Claudius. She shook her fist and hurled abuse, invoking the deified Claudius, the shades of the Silani, and her crimes.⁴³

By AD 55 Agrippina's violent behaviour was giving Nero increasing cause for concern, as was mounting evidence of the popularity of Britannicus. This, and Agrippina's persistent threats, made Nero despise Britannicus all the more. Suetonius says that in addition to Nero's envy at Britannicus's popularity, he was also jealous of his superior singing voice. Nero resolved to poison him. The captain of the Praetorian Guard, Julius Pollio, and the convicted professional poisoner Locusta (*damnata veneficii nomine Locusta, multa scelerum fama*) were enlisted. Locusta bungled again when she administered a poison which proved ineffective, acting only as a strong laxative.⁴⁴ Pollio was reprimanded and Locusta was flogged by Nero, who, quite reasonably, demanded to know why she had prescribed a medicine and not administered a poison (*arguens pro veneno remedium dedisse*). She promised to provide a second, much-more-powerful toxicant from her pharmacopeia; this was tested on a goat, which took a disappointing five hours to die. Nero ordered that the potion be reduced down to increase its potency; it was then trialled on a pig, which died immediately. Nero had his poison. The customary royal tasting and the taster were circumvented by serving Britannicus a drink which was too hot to consume; the cooling water poured into his cup was laced with the poison and it caused a seizure,

rendering him speechless and breathless. Nero affected disinterest and attributed the symptoms to epilepsy, which he said had afflicted Britannicus from childhood. He said that Britannicus would soon recover—he never did, of course, but the meal went on regardless.

His peremptory cremation took place that very night, with the minimum of ceremony or fuss. It all happened during a rainstorm, which conveniently washed off the gypsum that had been smeared on the corpse to camouflage the tell-tale skin-darkening caused by the poison. Agrippina, terrified and bewildered, realised that she was now on her own in this increasingly dangerous world. Octavia, young and equally disturbed, had learnt to conceal her grief and concerns. Locusta was rewarded with a free pardon, and even went on to supply Nero with human guinea pigs for her practice. As with the death of Claudius, there is some debate over the exact cause of the death of Britannicus; Nero's diagnosis of epilepsy may well have been correct. However, what is certain is that Agrippina appears not to have been implicated; the *Octavia* describes her weeping over Britannicus's corpse.⁴⁵

Agrippina had succeeded in her objective. She had helped Nero to become Emperor of Rome, and in doing so had satisfied her own desire for indirect power and influence. The more she paraded this, however, the more she antagonised and irritated her son. Nero tried either to assuage his guilt or show sympathy by distributing lavish gifts and bribes, but no amount of largesse would placate Agrippina, who now moved over to support Octavia. She held clandestine meetings with potential allies, and grabbed funds with even more than her natural greed. She kept in with the Praetorian Guard, befriended tribunes and centurions, and flattered the members of the nobility who were still alive; it appeared to the historians as if she was looking for a faction and a leader. When Nero discovered these intrigues in AD 56, he responded by withdrawing the military guard which Agrippina was entitled to (first in her former position as the Emperor's wife, and then as the Emperor's mother); her personal German bodyguard was also stood down. These two highly-visible indignities were eclipsed only when she was downsized from the Imperial palace to a separate house, a house which had belonged to Antonia the Younger. This move put an end to her political meetings and the influential *salutationes* she conducted alongside Nero.

Agrippina was, therefore, effectively isolated, and easy prey to anyone seeking vengeance. One such predator was Junia Silana. We have already seen how she was embroiled in Messalina's plot to murder Claudius, and how she was forced to divorce her husband, Gaius Silius.⁴⁶ Junia was noted for her lineage, her looks, and her lascivious behaviour (*insignis genere forma lascivia*), and had once been a friend of Agrippina. However, this friendship soured, mainly when Agrippina deterred the noble Titus Sextius Africanus from marrying Junia—Agrippina gossiped that she was a loose woman, and past it (*impudicam et vergentem annis dictitans*). Tacitus says that Agrippina had no designs on Africanus herself, but rather she was trying to keep her

friend, the childless (and heirless) wealthy widow out of the grasp of a bounty-hunter—probably because she had an eye on her friend’s legacy herself. Junia obviously did not appreciate Agrippina’s uncharacteristic altruism, and saw her chance for revenge.

The plot involved two of Junia’s clients, Iturius and Calvisius. They spurned the usual tired accusations that Agrippina was mourning Britannicus, or vitiating Octavia. Instead, they went for a story accusing Agrippina of inciting Rubellius Plautus, son of Tiberius’s granddaughter Julia, to overthrow Nero, planning to marry him, make Plautus Emperor, and take over Rome. Significantly, Plautus was just as well-connected to Augustus as Nero, and therefore posed a real threat. Iturius and Calvisius made their allegations to Atimetus, a freedman of Domitia (Nero’s aunt). Domitia was jubilant, as she and Agrippina were bitter rivals. Atimetus then urged Paris, another of Domitia’s freedmen and an Imperial actor, to hurry to Nero and divulge the shocking details of the fabricated plot.

Paris, who was a regular and usually jocund visitor to Nero’s chamber at that time of night, told Nero his sorry tale. The Emperor was terrified; his immediate reaction was to murder Agrippina and Plautus, and to remove Burrus (a noted ally of his mother) from his position as head of the Praetorian Guard. Historical accounts differ on what happened next, but Tacitus makes it clear that he will only mention the versions of Fabius Rusticus, Pliny the Elder, and Cluvius Rufus (now all lost) where they diverge.⁴⁷ Nero was frightened and keen to kill his mother (*trepidus et interficiendae matris avidus*), but others (particularly Seneca and Burrus) advised caution. They argued that Agrippina would indeed die if she was found guilty, but she had to be allowed and seen to defend herself. Moreover, there was only one accuser in the case and he was not particularly reliable. In short, it was late, they had had a good evening, and it was all a bit rash and silly (*omniaque temeritati et inscitiae propiora*).⁴⁸

Agrippina got her defence. Burra and Seneca visited Agrippina the following morning and read her the charges, so that she could deny them or confess and suffer the penalty. She responded with her usual ferocity (*ferocia*), demanding to know how Junia could possibly know what a mother feels. She facetiously stated that parents do not change their children as often as disreputable women like Junia change their adulterous men. She proceeded to discredit Iturius, Calvisius, Atimetus, Domitia, and Paris, to repudiate their motives, and to demand an audience with Nero. Here, she did not plead her innocence but instead won permission to reward her supporters and wreak vengeance on her accusers. Junia was exiled, Iturius and Calvisius were expelled, and Atimetus was executed. Paris escaped punishment, too-prominent a player in Nero’s nocturnal debaucheries. Altogether, this was a remarkable display of Agrippina’s power over Nero, especially at a time when the relationship between mother and son was at its lowest ebb.

In AD 58, Agrippina and Rome were threatened by another *impudicitia*,

this time in the person of Poppaea Sabina. Tacitus tells us that she was woman who had everything—everything, that is, apart from honesty.⁴⁹ She inherited glory and good looks from her exceptionally beautiful mother; she was rich, and a *docta puella* (*sermo comis nec absurdum ingenium*). She preached modesty (*modestia*) but practised salaciousness (*lascivia*). She was something of a recluse, but when she did go out she wore a veil—either to tantalise men or to accentuate the allure of her beauty. She cared nothing for her reputation, and made no distinction between married men and adulterers; she never lost control of herself, and she was never controlled by a man. Where there was a chance of advancement, her lust followed. Nero composed a poem which celebrated her striking auburn hair, and this triggered a fashion amongst the women of Rome. Her predilection for bathing in asses' milk also started a craze, as did 'Poppaea's Cream'—an anti-aging lotion which eradicated wrinkles. It is irresistible to make comparisons between her and Cleopatra. According to Dio, Poppaea believed it when someone told her that in milk 'lurked a magic which would dispel all diseases and blights from her beauty'.⁵⁰

Poppaea was first married to Rufinius Crispinus, and they had a son together. She later had an affair with the libertine Otho, Nero's very good friend, which ended in divorce for Crispinus and marriage to Otho. Tactlessly Otho would annoyingly praise Poppaea to the Emperor, ever reminding him of her beauty and elegance (*forma elegantiaque*), and going on about her nobility and fine looks (*dictitans nobilitatem pulchritudinem*). Impelled by this, Nero and Poppaea were inevitably attracted to each other, and an affair ensued. She coquettishly led him on, coaxing him, 'I'm a married woman; you still love Acte, your serving concubine.'⁵¹ He grew increasingly frustrated. Poppaea emphasised the difference between her fine lifestyle, with her one-of-a-kind Otho, and Nero's grubby, low-life, servile relationship. Otho was soon removed from the scene, posted to a governorship in far-off Lusitania to contemplate his tactlessness.⁵²

The following year, in AD 59, Nero's passion for Poppaea grew all the more intense. She had hopes of marrying the Emperor, but realised that this was unrealistic while Agrippina was still around. Accordingly, she set about nagging him, accusing him of being under his mother's thumb. An artful adulteress, she cited her own beauty, lineage, fertility, and sincerity in contrast to his mother's arrogance and greed. Poppaea's aim was persuade Nero to assassinate his mother, and marry her. According to Dio, Seneca also urged Nero to commit matricide.⁵³ Dio describes Poppaea's extravagance and vanity: she shod the donkeys which pulled her carriage with golden shoes, and had 500 asses that had recently foaled milked daily, so that she could bathe in their milk. One day, she caught sight of herself in a mirror and thought that maybe she did not look quite so beautiful; she then prayed that she would die before she passed her best.

Tacitus records how Cluvius relates that Agrippina, in a bid to compete

and maintain her influence, would dress up provocatively at around midday and offer up her body to an already inebriated Nero.⁵⁴ However, the lascivious kisses and shameful caresses did not go unnoticed; Seneca enlisted Acte's help, believing that only a woman could help against another woman's blandishments. She told Nero that his disgraceful incest was public knowledge, that Agrippina was glorying in telling everyone about it, and, crucially, that it was weakening his position with the Praetorian Guard. Tacitus and Cluvius believe that Agrippina fully understood the enormity (*immanitas*) of her incestuous actions, and that such a strange lust was only to be expected from a woman who had indulged in *stuprum* with Lepidus and then Pallas, and had married her own uncle. Rumour had it that Agrippina and Nero had sex every time they shared a litter, proven by the state their clothes were in when they emerged. Suetonius adds that Agrippina was later deterred from incest with Nero by her enemies, who gossiped that having sexual relations with him would only make him harder to tame and more despotic (*ferox atque impotens mulier*). Nero's reaction was to find another woman who looked exactly like her. According to Cassius Dio, 'when he toyed with the girl herself or displayed her charms to others, he would say that he was wont to have intercourse with his mother'.

By now, Agrippina (perhaps fearing the worst) began to spend more time at her villas outside Rome, at Tusculum and Antium. Nero had had enough of his meddlesome mother, and determined to murder her; the only issue was whether he would do it by poison, sword, or some other violent means. Like Tiberius before him, he had threatened to abdicate and go into exile on Rhodes. He had Agrippina pestered with irritating lawsuits, and he engaged people to go past her house loudly jeering and insulting her—but the antisocial behaviour was to no avail. Any plot was fraught with problems, not least Agrippina's paranoid but prudent habit of taking prophylactic antidotes against poisons. However, a solution came from a former tutor of Nero, Anicetus, who was now commander of the fleet at Misenum. Agrippina and Anicetus loathed each other. He came up with the ingenious idea of building a ship with a section that would fall away at sea, throwing Agrippina overboard. Dio says that the idea was inspired by a ship that Anicetus had seen in the theatre which automatically split in two, let out some animals, and then came together again, and which was quite seaworthy. A similar vessel was built while Nero showered his mother with flattery and devotion, in order to put her off guard. The festival of Minerva at Baiae, the Quinquatria, was chosen as the time and place; the special boat, built in Agrippina's honour and magnificently decked-out, was placed at her disposal. However, Agrippina got wind of the plot and travelled to Baiae by litter. After an extended banquet, Nero dutifully escorted his mother to the vessel, which she boarded with her attendants Crepereius Gallus and Acerronia Polla. Everyone was happy that Nero and Agrippina had seemingly been reconciled, and that her influence had been restored. Then, at the signal, the lead-lined canopy collapsed into the

boat, killing Gallus outright. Acerronia and Agrippina survived, the boat did not sink as planned, and the crew had to scuttle it. Acerronia made the fatal mistake of pretending to be Agrippina, and screamed for help; she was battered to death by oars and poles, while the injured Agrippina was able to swim to safety. She was picked up by some boats, and returned home.⁵⁵

Suetonius tells an even more dramatic version of the story. He says that Nero was irritated by his mother's overbearing behaviour, and made three attempts to poison her—but he was thwarted by timely antidotes, and she survived. Nero then attempted to crush her with a mechanical ceiling, suspended over her bed; when this failed because of a tip-off, he had a collapsible boat built, on which the cabin would fall in on itself—or it could be shipwrecked, with boats ramming it. In the event, Agrippina sailed to Baiae in her own boat; the worst thing that happened was a deliberately-staged collision in which her galley was damaged. For the return journey, a happy Nero escorted her to the quay, where he kissed her breasts before she boarded his custom-built boat—which had been offered on account of the damage to her own galley.

Dio's version states that on reaching Bauli, Nero gave a series of sumptuous banquets over several days, at which he entertained his mother:

...with every show of friendliness. If she were absent he feigned to miss her sorely, and if she were present he was lavish of caresses. He bade her ask whatever she desired, and bestowed many gifts without her asking ... he embraced her at the close of dinner about midnight, and straining her to his breast, kissed her eyes and hands, exclaiming, 'Strength and good health to you, mother. For you I live and because of you I rule.'⁵⁶

Dio describes the 'accident' as follows:

...though the ship parted asunder and Agrippina fell into the water, she did not perish. Notwithstanding that it was dark and that she was glutted with strong drink, and that the sailors used their oars against her with such force that they killed Acerronia Polla, her companion on the trip, she nevertheless got safely to shore...⁵⁷

Once home, she reflected on the truly traumatic incident she had just endured, deciding it was best not to reveal that she knew it was a murder conspiracy. She then sent out a search for Acerronia's will, and confiscated her property.⁵⁸ Nero, meanwhile, was frightened to death when he heard the news of Agrippina's survival, and realised that there could be no doubt in anyone's mind that he was the perpetrator. Fearing a coup, he summoned Burrus and Seneca for advice; they reasoned that Anicetus should finish what he had started, and Anicetus agreed. Agrippina's messenger, Agerinus, arrived, and was immediately implicated in a fabricated plot devised by Agrippina to assassinate Nero—the humiliating discovery of which would lead her to

suicide.

Agerinus arrived at Agrippina's house with a detachment of armed men. He broke in with two naval officers (Herculeius and Obaritus) and entered her bedroom, where Agrippina waited with one maid. The maid deserted her. Agrippina declared that Nero was not to blame in the boating incident, stating, 'But if you have come here to commit a crime, I believe my son is not involved, he would not murder his mother' (*'sin facinus patraturus, nihil se de filio credere; non imperatum parricidium'*). One of the officers smashed her on the head with a club; when the other drew his sword to finish her off, she shouted, 'Strike my womb!' (*'ventrem feri'*)—a dying reference to Nero. Dio is more explicit:

...she knew for what they had come, and leaping up from her bed she tore open her clothing, exposing her abdomen, and cried out, 'Strike here, Anicetus, strike here, because this bore Nero!'⁵⁹

Of course, Agrippina had been expecting this for years. However, she believed that murder was a price worth paying for her son's success. We have seen how at Nero's birth the Chaldean astronomers told her that Nero would indeed be Emperor, but that he would kill his mother—to which she retorted, 'Let him kill her, just so long as he is Emperor.' When she lived, she was prepared to die for Nero and for her aspirations for him. At her death, now that those aspirations had been realised, Tacitus and Dio have us believe that she now symbolically wished her son dead. '*Ventrem feri*' would have resonated in the well-read Roman man and woman; it would have evoked a scene in Seneca's *Oedipus*, in which the incestuous Jocasta guides her suicide hand to strike not her breast or her throat but her 'capricious womb, bearer of husband and sons' (*'hunc, dextra, hunc pete uterum capacem, qui uirum et gnatos tulit'*). The allusion to incest is clear; the implication that the relationship between Agrippina and Nero reflects some of the pathos of a tragic Jocasta is a provocative and compelling denouement to a terrible and tragic life.⁶⁰

Tacitus believes that some sources insisted that Nero then displayed an unhealthy interest in his mother's corpse:

Nero ran off to look at the murdered body, fondling the limbs, finding fault with other parts, taking a drink when he got thirsty.

ad visendum interfectae cadaver accurrens, contrectasse membra, alia vituperasse, sitique interim oborta bibisse

For Dio, the suggestions of necrophilia are more opaque, but just as sinister:

...the deed was so monstrous that he was overwhelmed by incredulity; he therefore desired to behold the victim of his crime with his own eyes. So he

laid bare her body, looked her all over, and inspected her wounds, finally uttering a remark far more abominable than even the murder. His words were: 'I did not know I had such a beautiful mother.'⁶¹

Agrippina was cremated that night, with a frugal ceremony. She was laid in a grave which remained open until after the death of Nero; she was then laid to rest in a modest tomb, on the road to Misenum.

Nero was petrified, and feared the worst. He only calmed down when the officers of the Praetorian Guard visited him on Burrus's orders, offering their congratulations. There was much popular rejoicing. Nero retired to Naples in his sham grief and wrote to the Senate condemning Agerinus, concluding that Agrippina had paid the price for her conspiracy. The letter also featured a litany of accusations against Agrippina. He alleged that she had wanted to be consort with him, and that she had sought oaths of allegiance from the Praetorian Guard and the Senate, and, when they refused, she had hated the Senate, the army, and the Roman people. He stated that she had opposed gratuities to the army and to the people, and had put distinguished men to death; she had to be restrained from bursting into the Senate and advising foreign envoys, and she was to blame for everything that went wrong during the reign of Claudius. In short, Nero argued that her death was a piece of good luck all round (*publica fortuna*); even the shipwreck was fortuitous. Of course, many were sceptical, but the recriminations for the calumnies fell on Seneca, the author of the letter, rather than on Nero.

Agrippina's birthday was declared as one of the inauspicious days (*dies nefasti*). To curry favour in the wake of his mother's death, Nero gave two illustrious ladies their ancestral homes back (Junia Calvina and Calpurnia); two ex-praetors, Valerius Capito and Licinius Gabolus, were recalled from exile—both had been banished by Agrippina. He allowed the ashes of Lollia Paulina to be brought back to Rome, and built a tomb over them. Julia Silana's henchmen Iturius and Calvisius, whom he had expelled, were also allowed to return. The omens, however, were not good. One woman gave birth to a snake, while another was struck by lightning while she was having sex with her husband; the sun went out, and the fourteen districts of Rome were struck by lightning. Nevertheless, after a triumphant return to Rome, Tacitus tells us that Nero:

...then immersed himself in all sorts of debaucheries, from which hitherto a kind of respect for Agrippina had not exactly restrained him, but had modulated his behaviour.

...seque in omnes libidines effudit, quas male coercitas qualiscumque matris reverentia tardaverat.

Even in death, Agrippina's influence and malevolence came to bear, not least on her enemies.⁶² Suetonius gives us a long and blood-stained list of murders.

Firstly, Nero disposed of Domitia Lepida, his aunt. He visited her when she was in bed, ill with constipation; she affectionately stroked his growing beard, and declared that she would die happy when Nero presented her with his beard on his coming of age.⁶³ Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Nero shaved off his beard and ordered his doctors to administer a fatal dose of laxative to Domitia. He confiscated her property and ripped up her will; he particularly coveted her estates at Baiae and around Ravenna, on which he promptly built magnificent gymnasia.

Nero was not averse to physically abusing his wives. He had tried to strangle his first wife, Octavia, on three occasions. The politically contrived marriage bored him; he loathed her because she was popular and the daughter of an Emperor, so he divorced her on the grounds that she was barren. Poppaea Sabina, however, was not satisfied; Tacitus tells us how she had one of Octavia's slave girls denounce Octavia for adultery with an Alexandrian flautist called Eucærus. 'Witnesses' refused to condemn her, even under torture. As we know, one such brave witness was Pythias, a slave girl who stood up for Octavia under interrogation and torture; she defiantly spat in the face of her interrogator, Tigellinus, when he questioned Octavia's virtue, exclaiming, 'My mistress's vagina [*muliebria*] is cleaner than your mouth!'⁶⁴ This was a particularly humiliating insult for a Roman, who revered the mouth as an organ of oratory—the vagina and its associations with oral sex were anathema. Octavia was banished to Campania under military guard. The resulting public outcry caused Nero to reconsider; he reinstated Octavia amongst scenes of great rejoicing, during which Poppaea's statues were toppled and Octavia's were decked with garlands and paraded. However, the army intervened violently, and Poppaea was then restored, according to Tacitus, 'hateful as ever, then terrified lest the power of the mob intensified on her or that Nero be swayed by the popular mood' (*quæ semper odio, tum et metu atrox, ne aut vulgi acrior vis ingrueret aut Nero inclinatione populi mutaretur*).⁶⁵ Poppaea persuaded Nero to finish off his former wife, so he bribed Anicetus to allege he had had an affair with that Octavia. Nero announced that Octavia had plotted to take over the fleet by seducing Anicetus, and that she had undergone an abortion (conveniently forgetting his charge of infertility) to hide her libidinous behaviour. Nero exiled her to Pandateria, where she was told of her impending death a few days later. Octavia invoked the name of Agrippina, but to no avail. She was tied up and her veins were cut, and to speed things up she was placed in a very hot bath. Her head was presented to Poppaea in Rome.⁶⁶

Nero later kicked Poppaea to death when she was heavily pregnant; she had complained of being ill, and had the temerity to scold him for returning late from the races. Tacitus says that she was buried in the Mausoleum of Augustus; her body was not cremated (according to Roman custom), but was stuffed with spices and embalmed in the Oriental way.⁶⁷ The birth of their first child, Claudia Augusta, had been greeted with much celebration—temples

were dedicated, gold statues were erected, and festivals and games were held in her honour. However, Claudia died aged just fourteen months.

The aftermath of Poppaea's death led to even more psychotic and unbalanced behaviour from Nero. He missed Poppaea so much that he detained and debauched a woman who resembled her; later, he had a boy called Sporus castrated since he also resembled Poppaea, and he abused him as a wife. In time, although he was already 'married' to Pythagoras (a freedman), he also 'married' Sporus, in Greece. Tigellinus gave the eunuch away at the sham wedding; Nero provided a dowry, and put on the wedding ceremony. His wedding to Pythagoras in AD 64 also took place in full regalia, with Nero wearing a bridal veil, with dowry, marriage bed, and torches all on public view. Now Nero had two men in his bed—Pythagoras played the role of his husband, and Sporus that of his wife. The latter was called 'lady', 'queen', and 'mistress'.

Antonia, Claudius's daughter, was selected to take Poppaea's place, but she refused. She was then executed on a charge of attempting a coup. Nero raped Aulus Plautius and then killed him, declaring that Agrippina could now come and kiss his successor—Nero believed that she had conducted an affair with Plautius, and had backed him in a takeover bid for the throne. Nero had Rufius Crispinus, Poppaea's son from an earlier marriage, killed by the boy's own slaves while he was out fishing—the reason was that Rufius had been innocently playing 'generals and Emperors'—this was seen as treasonable. Nero drove Seneca to suicide in AD 65, and poisoned Burrus with a toxic cough medicine. Seneca planned for his wife, Pompeia Paulina, to die with him, but she survived her suicide attempt when Nero's soldiers staunched her bleeding. She lived on, loyal to her husband's memory.

Even Nero could not escape the ghost of Agrippina. In his *Life of Nero*, Suetonius tells us how Nero had never been bothered by dreams, but after murdering his mother nightmares and omens began to terrify him. One, in particular, found him at the tiller of a ship; the tiller was wrenched away, and Octavia pulled him down into the darkness, were winged ants swarmed all over his body. The statues in the theatre of Pompey crowded in on him, blocking his exit, while his Asturian horse turned into an ape—apart from its head, which neighed out a tune. The doors of the Mausoleum of Augustus opened for him, bidding him to enter. For Dio, Nero's feelings of guilt and paranoia were much worse:

...his own conscience was so disturbed at night that he would leap suddenly from his bed, and by day, when he merely heard the blare of trumpets sounding forth some stirring martial strain from where lay Agrippina's bones, he would be terror-stricken. He therefore kept changing his residence; and when he had the same experience in the new place also, he would move in utter fright elsewhere.⁶⁸

On the face of it, public reaction and the Senate's reception to Nero's letter

was sycophantic and joyful; however, there was joy because many thought that it would lead to Nero's downfall. One solitary, brave display of antipathy and opposition came from Publius Thrasea Paetus, who defiantly walked out of the Senate in disgust at the toadying behaviour of his colleagues. Elsewhere some of Agrippina's statues were toppled, and her name was scraped off public buildings. Privately, there was much opposition to the Emperor. A leather bag was draped on one of his statues; this was a traditional punishment for parricides, where the criminal was sewn up in a leather bag together with a dog, a cock, a viper, and an ape, and thrown into the water to drown. A baby was dumped in the Forum with a label bearing the words: 'I will not raise you, lest you slay your mother'. Statues of Agrippina were torn down but one proved difficult, so a garland was thrown over it, making it look as though it was veiled. Someone then added a graffito saying: 'I am ashamed, and you are unashamed'. The graffito 'Orestes, Nero, Alcmeon—all matricides' started to appear, as did references to Nero and Aeneas—one carried off his father, Anchises, to escape the sacking of Troy, while the other carried off his mother. The omens were also bad: during sacrifices offered in Agrippina's honour, there was a total eclipse of the sun and the stars came out; the elephants which drew Nero's chariot would go no further than the Senator's seats; and a thunderbolt struck Nero's dinner and consumed it all, like a Harpy snatching away his food.

Dio adds that Nero hypocritically organised a series of festivals over several days in honour of Agrippina, in five or six theatres at once. An elephant was led up to the highest gallery of one theatre and walked down on ropes, carrying a rider. The most disgraceful and humiliating thing to Dio was when men and women of the equestrian and senatorial orders were ignominiously forced to 'appear as performers in the orchestra, in the Circus, and in the hunting-theatre'. Such degrading roles were usually the preserve of the lower orders, and were held in contempt.

Some of them played the flute and danced in pantomimes, or acted in tragedies and comedies, or sang to the lyre; they drove horses, killed wild beasts, and fought as gladiators, some willingly and some against their will. So the men of that day beheld the great families—the Furi, the Horatii, the Fabii, the Porcii, the Valerii, and all the rest, whose trophies and whose temples were to be seen all around—standing down there below them and doing things some of which they formerly would not even watch when performed by others.⁶⁹

Such was the fallout from Nero's murder of his mother. The extraordinary lengths Agrippina had been prepared to go for Nero were, of course, horrendous and odious. They do, however, tend to conceal and even negate some aspects of her character which deserve wider recognition. Her marriage to Claudius brought a level of stability to his reign, and her relations with the Praetorian Guard were tactfully and diplomatically conducted. Her *colonia* at

Cologne was a notable piece of local diplomacy, while her virtual regency with Nero—ever-diminishing as it was—nevertheless acted as a buffer to the excesses and atrocities which were to be manifested, uncontrolled, after her death. Like Livia before her, she had the distinction of wielding direct influence over two Roman Emperors. Similarly, she also enjoyed *de facto* power which eventually faltered because of her failure to control and temper her son.

Statilia Mesallina (c. AD 35–after AD 68) became Nero’s third wife in around AD 65. Her fourth husband was Marcus Julius Vestinus Atticus, who foolishly married Statilia when he knew her to be one of Nero’s mistresses; he was forced to commit suicide so that Nero could marry her. She sensibly maintained a low profile and lived an unobtrusive life compared with her predecessors; her political inconspicuousness allowed her to outlive Nero, who died in AD 68. If, as is thought, she is the pedant disparagingly referred to in Juvenal’s sixth satire, then we know that she was considerably intelligent. However, Juvenal was far from impressed; the ‘vigour of her verbiage’ (*‘vis verborum’*) apparently silences everyone at a dinner party—lawyers, auctioneers, teachers of rhetoric, and even other women. Juvenal’s recommendation was that she should just go away and be a man.⁷⁰ After Nero’s death she was betrothed to Otho, but he committed suicide before the marriage could take place.⁷¹

Epilogue

Juvenal's excoriating advice makes for a fitting conclusion to this study of influential Roman women. 'Go away and be a man,' he rails at a woman who had the temerity to raise her head above the parapet, to try and achieve more than her expected lot, and to get on in life. The women discussed here have all displayed an array of characteristics: they could be devoted wives and mothers, faithful, intelligent, religious, talented, charismatic, ambitious, obtrusive, powerful, permissive, adulterous, manipulative, and dangerous. They often died before their time. Nevertheless, they all had one very important thing in common—crucially, they did not just influence the men and other women who they came into contact with, but they also all made a mark on the progress and history of one of the most powerful civilisations the world has ever known.

These Roman women made their impact from a position of social, legal, religious, political, and military inferiority, imposed on them by centuries of male tradition, which manifested in chauvinism, domination, and intractable convention. These women were fighting in a man's world, where the slightest variance from the accepted norm of female behaviour was usually met with (often sexualised) scandal, slur, and slander. A female achievement of any kind led to defeminisation and masculinisation, and was often explained away by the actions of a husband, brother, or son; women had a limited role to play, and less to say, from the fringes of a male-dominated society. Women were never going to take over the Roman world, or even achieve anything like equality—far from it. It could be argued that the Romans did rather well with things how they were; however, it is important to remember that a small number of women did make an impact and did have influence. Therefore, it is important to judge and assess the achievements of Rome with these women in mind.

Endnotes

Introduction

1. John Chrysostom, *The Type of Women Who Ought to be Taken as Wives* 4; Livy 34.7.
2. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 172-175. Translation by C. D. Yonge: *A Treatise on Those Special Laws Which Are Referrible to Two Commandments in the Decalogue, the Sixth and Seventh, Against Adulterers and All Lewd Persons, and Against Murderers and All Violence*, (London 1854).
3. Plautus, *Bacchae* 41.
4. Cicero, *Pro Murena* 12, 27.
5. Martial 8, 12.
6. On this see Joshel, *The Body Female* pp. 14-15.
7. Tacitus, *Annals* 1, 4, 5; 4, 57, 4; 12, 57, 5.
8. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 6, 10, 1.
9. Cicero, *De Legibus* 2, 9, 21; 2, 35, 7.
10. Livy 39, 15, 6; 39, 8.
11. Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 104; *Moralia* 288-289; transl. F. C. Babbitt, 1936, Vol. 4.
12. Livy 39, 15, 9, 13-14.
13. Livy 39, 17.
14. Livy 39, 19-22. Livy says that there were more executions than imprisonments. The inscription was discovered at Tiriolo, southern Italy, in 1640.
15. Livy, 8, 18, 6.
16. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 2, 71, 4.
17. For the significance of wool working see Dixon, *Reading Roman Women* p. 117ff, and Chrystal, *Women in Ancient Rome* p. 20ff.
18. For wool see Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 1, 126e-127a; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 520, 538; *Birds* 829-831; Diodorus 3, 53; Herodotus 2, 35; Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 339-341; Pindar, *Pythian Ode* 9, 19-22; Euripides, *Bacchae* 1236; Diogenes Laertius 6, 96-98.
19. Livy 27, 37, 1-15.
20. Cicero, *de Oratore* 2, 11.
21. Propertius, 4, 3.
22. Statius, *Silvae* 5, 1.
23. Valeria Plutarch, *Sulla* 35, 4-5; Praecia, *idem*, *Lucullus*, 6, 2, 3.
24. Cicero, *In Verrem* 2, 1, 120; 136-140.

Chapter One

1. *Rara castitas*—although this was a fairly common eulogy frequently found on tombstones, there is no reason to doubt that the words rang true. Massilia (modern-day Marseille) was a Greek colony that was founded in around 600 BC; it retained—and was noted for—its Greek culture throughout the classical period. For the traditional Roman suspicion of philosophy see Cicero, *de Officiis* 2, 2; Tacitus, *Histories* 4, 5, 2; Suetonius, *Nero* 52.
2. Tacitus, *Agricola* 4, 2-4; translation H. Mattingley, *Tacitus, The Agricola and the Germania*.
3. Tacitus, *Dialogus de Oratoribus* 28, 4; Juvenal 14.
4. Ovid, *Fasti* 2. The scene is reminiscent of New Comedy.
5. Livy 1, 57-60. See also Juvenal 10, 293. For the controversies surrounding this episode, and the dates, see Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 215-218.
6. Cicero, *De Legibus* 2, 5; *de Republica* 2, 25, 46. See also *de Finibus* 2, 20, 66.
7. Martial, 11, 104, 21. See also Petronius 9, 5.
8. Ovid, *Fasti* 2, 721-852.

9. Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium* 6, 1, 1.
10. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1, 464; Tacitus, *Agricola* 16, 1; 31, 4. Tacitus calls the militarily-minded Agrippina the Elder *dux* at *Annals* 1, 69, 2: '*sed femina ingens animi munia ducis per eos dies induit*'—'but that determined woman took on the duties of a leader during those times'. Cloelia is described by Livy as *dux* in her brave escapade.
11. Livy 3, 44-48; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 11, 35, 4.
12. For Verginia and liberty see Livy 44, 12; 45, 11, 46, 7; 46, 8; 48, 5. Joshel, *The Body Female* p. 113. Tacitus: *Histories* 3, 4, 1; *Annals* 2, 75, 1-2; 80, 4.
13. Labial adhesion: Pliny *Historia Naturalis* 7, 69. Solinus, *De Mirabilibus Mundi* 1, 67. Livy 38, 57, 5-8. Cf, however, Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 4, 5.
14. Polybius, translated by John Dryden, Book 31 *Fragment* 26.
15. Plutarch *Gaius Gracchus* 4, 3; 19, 1-3. Translation by Ian Scott-Kilvert in *Plutarch, Makers of Rome*. Valerius Maximus 4, 6, 1.
16. For the snake anecdote see Cicero, *de Divinatione* 1,36, and 2,62; Pliny, *op. cit.* 7, 122; Valerius Maximus *op.cit.*; *Viribus Illustribus* 56, 16.
17. For Cornelia's fecundity see Pliny, *op. cit.* 7, 57 and Seneca, *ad Helviam* 16, 6; Pliny, *op. cit.* 7, 57.
18. Plutarch, *op. cit.*, 1, 2-5; translation Ian Scott- Kilvert.
19. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 1, 6.
20. Tacitus, *Dialogus de Oratoribus* 28.
21. Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* 15-17, 20; see also Nepos, *Fragmenta* 1-2, *de Viris Illustribus*.
22. Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus* 4, 3, transl. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA, 1921) with adaptations.
23. See Cicero, *Brutus* 211; Quintilian, *op. cit.* 1.1.6. For the apparent contradiction in Cornelia's argument see Fantham, *Women in the Classical World* p. 265, and Petrocelli, *Cornelia the Matron* p. 55ff.
24. Pliny, *op. cit.* 13, 83. Cicero, *op. cit.* 104.
25. Valerius Maximus, *op.cit.* 3, 8, 6;4.4, *praefatio*.
26. Appian, *Bellum Civile* 1, 19-20; the translation is by Horace White in the 1913 Loeb edition. Martial 11, 104.
27. Pliny, *op. cit.* 34, 31.
28. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 28; Plutarch, *Caesar* 9.
29. Cicero, *De Haruspicum Responsis* 17, 37—18, 38.
30. Juvenal 6, 335-341.
31. Pliny, *Ep.* 3, 16 3-6.
32. Martial 1, 13.
33. Pliny, *N.H.* 6.24. See also Valerius Maximus *op. cit.* 4.6 and 6.7 on brave and faithful wives; Appian *BC* 4, 39-40.
34. Tacitus, *Annals* 6, 29; 16, 10.
35. *Ibid.* 15, 63, 2-4.
36. Pliny, *Ep.* 3, 16, 7-9.
37. Valerius Maximus, *op. cit.*, 6.7. 1-3.
38. Quintilian, *op. cit.* 8, 5, 16.

Chapter Two

1. Quintilian, *Inst.* 1, 4, 2; 1, 1, 30 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Composition* 3.
2. Tacitus, *Dialogus de Oratoribus* 28; Quintilian *loc. cit.*, 15-17, 20; Nepos, *Fragmenta* 1-2 *de Viris Illustribus*.
3. Appian, *Bellum Civile* 4, 136-146; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 8, 3, 3; Quintilian 1, 1, 6.
4. Cicero, *Brutus* 58, 211.
5. Sallust, *Catilina* 25. See Baldson, *Roman Women* pp.47-49 for the controversy surrounding Sallust's description of her.
6. Nepos, *Prologue to the Lives of the Foreign Generals* 6. Sallust, *op. cit.* 14.
7. Appian, *op. cit.* 4, 32-4.
8. Valerius Maximus, *op.cit.*
9. Juvenal 6, 434-40.
10. Valerius Maximus, 8, 2.

11. Ulpian, *Digest* 3, 1, 2.
12. Juvenal 6, 242-5; 2, 51-2.
13. All originally by Cicero: *de Oratore* 161; *Ad Att.* 7, 2, 21; *Tusculanae Disputationes* 3, 45. See Chrystal, *Investigation* p. 15ff; Ross, *Backgrounds*; Tuplin, *Cantores Euphorionis*; *idem*, *Cantores Euphorionis Again*; Luck, *Latin Love Elegy* p.49ff; Crowther, *Valerius Cato*; see Lyne *Latin Love Poets* pp. 169-174. For *otium* see Andre, *L'Otium*.
14. Plutarch 8, 1; 18; Polybius 31.
15. Plutarch, *loc. cit.*; Livy 24, 2-4; Aulus Gellius 7, 6-8. Cf Arkins, *Aspects of Sexuality* p.8ff.
16. See G. Colin, *Rome et la Grece*; J. Griffin *Augustan Poetry* p. 88ff and the Appendix, *Some Imperial Servants*. Various suggestions for the start and/or cause of the decline have been made: Polybius, 31, 25 ascribes it to the victory over Macedonia; L. Calpurnius Piso (Pliny *NH* 17, 38, 244) goes with 154 BC; Appian, *Bellum Civile* 1, 7 for the end of the war in Italy; Livy 39, 6, 7 prefers 186 BC; Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae Romanae*, and Sallust, *Catilina* 10 opt for the end of the Third Punic War. See also Putnam, *The Roman Lady*; Reinhold, *The Generation Gap* p.52ff.
17. See Pomeroy, *Relationship* p. 222ff; del Castillo, *Position* p. 171; and Villers, *Statut* p. 184f.
18. Kiefer, *Sexual Life* p. 24.
19. See Horace, *Odes* 3, 6.
20. Kajanto, *On Divorce*; Hamilton, *Society Women*. Pomeroy, *op. cit.*, argues that in Catullus's day women were enjoying a *de facto* freedom on account of the disinterest shown by many *propinqui*. Decline in *patria potestas* is covered by Reinhold, *op. cit.* p. 49; see also Fau p. 30 and del Castillo, *op. cit.* pp. 167-170; Richlin, *Approaches*.
21. *Suavis, elegans*, (13, 10), *urbanus, salsus* (39, 7-8 and 22, 2), *venustus* (31, 12), *lepidus* (1, 1). See Ross, *op. cit.* pp. 1-17, and Hus, *Doctus*. Other 'in' words we could add could be *dicax* and *doctus*. Ross (*Style* p. 106) points out 'such words did not form part of a neoteric program; but their avoidance by later poets only emphasises the singular use Catullus made of them'.
22. On educated women generally, see Best, *Cicero*; Griffin, *op. cit.* p. 103, and Fau, *op. cit.* p. 12. Eucharis: *CIL* 1, 1214; Cytheris: Cicero, *Fam* 9, 26; *Phil* 2, 69. See also Hallett, *The Role of Women*, and Lyne, *op. cit.* p.7.
23. Cornelius Nepos, *Praefatio* 8; Friedlander, *Roman Life Vol I* p. 238ff; Mohler, *Feminism*; Will, *Women in Pompeii*; Sullivan, *Propertius* p. 82-83; Fau, *op. cit.* p. 13; del Castillo, *op. cit.* pp. 168-169.
24. See Griffin, *op. cit.* p. 96; Mohler, *op. cit.* p. 155. Griffin, on page 103 lists the types of independent women circulating in Rome in the early Empire.
25. So Rankin, *Clodia II* p.505, 'it would be possible to claim Clodia (Lesbia) as an intellectual on the grounds of poem 36 alone'. Gallus' wife (78, 2) is *lepidissima coniunx*; Laodamia, = Lesbia, is *docta* (68, 80).
26. Catullus 87, 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 43, 51, 75.
27. *idem*, 58
28. For Sulpicia, see Percy, *Erasing Cynthia*; Santirocco, *Sulpicia Reconsidered*; Keith, – *Critical Trends*; Hubbard, *The Invention of Sulpicia*; Holzberg, *Four Poets*; Hallett, *The Eleven Elegies*; Churchill, *Women Writing Latin*.
29. Tibullus, 3.13.9
30. Martial, 10, 35; see also 10, 38.
31. Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 8, 18; 13, 32. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8, 6, 53. On the Lesbia identification issue see Dixon, *Reading Roman* pp. 137ff; Wiseman, *Lesbia and Her Children* in Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet* pp. 104-118.
32. See Leen, *Clodia Oppugnatrix* for more on this.
33. Cicero, *op. cit.* 64.
34. *Op. cit.* 13,32

Chapter Three

1. *Odes* 3, 30, 9.
2. *Aeneid* 1, 292.
3. Lactantius, *Institutiones Divinae* 1, 12; Plutarch, *Numa* 9; Ovid, *Fasti* 6, 291.
4. Virgil, *op. cit.* 2, 296; 567.
5. Plutarch, *Camillus*, 20-21.

6. Numa, 9.
7. Ovid, *Fasti* 6, 267ff; Dionysius 2, 68.
8. Pliny the Elder, *NH* 7, 19, 1.
9. Pliny, *Ep.* 7, 19. Tacitus, *Histories* 1, 3.
10. Livy, 1, 3; Ennius, *The Dream of Ilia* (Rhea Silvia), in *Annales*, 1. See also Ovid, *Fasti* 2, 383.
11. Livy, 1, 4. See Adams, *Latin Words for Woman and Wife; The Latin Sexual Vocabulary and Words for Prostitute in Latin*
12. See Virgil, *Aeneid* 6, 778 for his pageant of the lineage of Aeneas in which Ilia features.
13. Livy, 1:20.
14. Plutarch, *Numa*, 9.5–10; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2, 66.
15. Varro, *De Lingua Latina*.
16. Livy 1, 11.
17. Tacitus, *Annals* 2, 86, 2.
18. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 1, 12.
19. Aulus Gellius, *op. cit.* 1, 12, 14.
20. Pliny, *NH* 16, 235; Festus 57.
21. See S. Pappas, www.livescience.com/26112-oldest-roman-hairstyle-recreated.html
22. Tacitus, *ibid.*
23. See Beard, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, pp. 52-3. For details of the festivals, see Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion* p. 41; Worsfold, pp. 25-9.
24. *Fasti* 6, 621-60.
25. Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 5, 45; 7, 44.
26. Pliny, *op. cit.* 18, 7.
27. Cicero, *Pro Fonteio*, 17.
28. Propertius 4, 1, 21 for Vesta and donkeys. Ovid, *op. cit.* 6, 311ff. Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 83; Dio 61, 30. Tacitus, *ibid* 1, 8. Appian, *Bellum Civile* 5, 73; Dio Cassius 48, 37. Livia: Dio, 60, 5, 2.
29. Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 96, *Moralia* 286-287.
30. Dionysius 3, 67
31. Plutarch, *Numa* 10.
32. Livy, 8, 15; 4, 44.
33. Dionysius 26, 87.
34. Livy *Periochae* 14.
35. Orosius, *Histories Against the Pagans* 4, 2
36. *Life of Crassus* 1.
37. Suetonius, *Nero* 28
38. Livy, 22, 57, 2.
39. Plutarch, *Cicero* 20. Caesar: Suetonius, *op. cit.* 1. Pardalas: *CIL* 6, 2131.
40. Claudia, Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 34. Vibidia, Tacitus, *op. cit.* 11, 32.
41. Valerius Maximus 8.1.5; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 10, 16; Dionysius 2, 68; *RE* vii A 768-770; see also Richlin, *Carrying Water*. Licinia Cicero, *De Domo Sua*, 53, 136.
42. Herodian 1, 11.
43. Suetonius, *Domitian* 8, 3-5; Pliny, *Ep* 4, 11, 6. Caracalla: Herodian 4, 6, 4.
44. Valerius Maximus 3, 7, 9; 6, 8, 1. Cicero, *In Catilinam* 3, 9.
45. Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 3, 13.
46. Dio 77, 16, 1-3; 79, 9; 79, 9, 3.
47. Macrobius, *op. cit.* 3, 13, 11. Pliny, *op. cit.* 28, 13.
48. Dio 55, 22, 5.
49. Aulus Gellius, 1, 12, 9.
50. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 25, 10-11.
51. Zosimus, *New History* 5, 138.

Chapter Four

1. Busa: Livy 22, 52, 7; 54, 2-4; Valerius Maximus 4, 8, 2.
2. Lavinia: Livy 1, 2; Virgil, *Aeneid* 7, 69-101. Ovid describes her apotheosis at *Metamorphoses* 14, 830; see also *Metamorphoses* 14, 337ff.
3. For Hersilia see Livy 11, 1-4; Macrobius 1, 6, 16; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2, 45; Plutarch, *Romulus* 14. Wiseman, *The Wife and Children of Romulus*.
4. Livy 1, 13.
5. Livy, 2, 40.
6. Servius, *On Virgil* 1, 720

7. Livy 34, 7, 12. Plutarch, *Cato Maior* 8, 4.
8. Plutarch, *Sulla* 35
9. Plutarch, *Lucullus* 6, 2, 3.
10. Caerellia: Cicero: *Ad Familiares* 13, 72, 1; *Ad Atticum*. 15, 26, 4; 13, 21, 5.
11. Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 50, 2.
12. Valerius Maximus 9, 1, 3. Cicero, *op. cit.* 15, 11, 2; 15, 12, 1. Plutarch, *Brutus*, 5.1; Plutarch, *Cato* 24, 1. Porcia: Plutarch, *Brutus* 13, 4; *ibid*, *Cato* 25, 3. Translation is by Ian Scott-Kilvert and Christopher Pelling, *Plutarch: Rome in Crisis*. Valerius Maximus, 3, 2, 15. Plutarch, *Brutus* 23, 6. Cicero, *De Republica* 1, 67.
13. Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 5, 2, 6; Dio 48, 16, 3; 51, 2, 4-5.
14. Cicero, *Oratio pro Sexto Roscio* 27
15. Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 4, 1; 226, 3; 360, 1; 151, 1; *Ad Att.* 114, 9; 200, 3; 201, 4.
16. Cicero, *op. cit.* 2, 4; *Ad Fam.* 14, 1.
17. *Idem*, *Ad Fam.* 14, 4.
18. Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1, 18.
19. Plutarch, *Cicero* 29. The translation is Rex Warner's in Plutarch: *Fall of the Roman Republic*.
20. Cicero, *Ad Att.* 15, 11.
21. *Idem*, *Ad Fam.* 14, 4-6; 14, 2. Ovid, *Tristia* 4, 56-66. Ovid was actually relegated, rather than exiled. He would, therefore, have retained his citizenship.
22. *Ibid*.
23. Plutarch, *op. cit.* 20. Translation by Warner, *op. cit.*
24. Cicero *Ad Att.* 6, 6, 1 and *Ad Fam.* 8, 6, 2 for his sanguine resignation.
25. *Idem Att.* 1, 3, 3 and 6, 6, 1; *Ad Q. Fratrem* 2, 4, 2; 2, 6, 2; See also Collins, *Engagement; Treggiari, Roman Social History* pp. 49ff.
26. Cicero *Ad Att.* 11, 1.
27. Plutarch, *op. cit.* 41.
28. Cicero *op. cit.* 11.25
29. Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 14.12; 14.11, *Ad Att.* 11, 17; 11, 19
30. *Idem*, *Ad Fam* 14, 3.
31. Plutarch, *op. cit.*
32. Pliny, *NH*, 8, 48; Valerius Maximus, 8, 13.
33. Velleius Paterculus *Histories* 2, 74
34. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 47, 8, 4.
35. Plutarch, *op. cit.* 49.
36. Livy, 1, 46.
37. Livy 1, 17.
38. Cicero: *Philippics* 3, 16.
39. Martial 11, 104, 17-21.
40. Florus 2, 16, 2. Valerius Maximus 3, 5, 3. Appian, 5, 3, 19.
41. Suetonius, *Augustus* 62; Dio, 48, 5, 3.
42. Cicero, *Pro Milone* 28; 55.
43. Asconius, *op. cit.* 31-32.
44. Asconius, *op. cit.* 28; 35. Cicero, *op. cit.*
45. Plutarch, *Antony* 10, 3.
46. Appian, 2, 7, 45.
47. Cicero, *Philippics* 2, 48; 2, 99.
48. Appian 3, 8, 51.
49. Appian, 4.4.29.
50. Dio, 47.8.2-3.
51. Appian, 4, 32-4.
52. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 3, 33
53. Cicero, *op. cit.* 1, 3, 16.
54. Cicero, *op. cit.* 3, 4; 5, 22; Cicero, *op. cit.* 13, 15; 13, 18.
55. Appian 3, 8, 51. Cicero, *op. cit.* 6, 4. Catamitum: *op. cit.* 2, 77; *imperium: op. cit.* 3, 10. *Fatale:* 2, 11.
56. Cicero, *op. cit.* 2, 25, 61.
57. Cicero, *op. cit.* 3.16. Cytheris: 2.58; 2.61; 2.62; 2, 45. Deiotarus: Cicero, *op. cit.* 2, 95; *Ad Att.* 14, 2, 1.
58. Dio, 48, 4, 1-6.

59. Appian 5, 3, 19; 5, 2, 14.
60. Appian, 5, 3, 19. Dio 48, 10, 3.
61. Appian 5, 4, 32-3.
62. Dio, 48, 4, 1-6.
63. Appian, *op. cit.* Dio 48, 15, 1.
64. Velleius Paterculus 2, 74, 3.
65. See Hallet, *Perusinae Glandes*. *CIL* 11 6721.7; for Fulvia's sexuality see *CIL* 11, 6721.14, *CIL* 11, 6721.5, *CIL* 11, 6721.3; 6721.4; 6721.5; 6721.14. Appian 5, 3, 21; Velleius Paterculus 2, 74, 3; Dio. 48, 10, 3.
66. Dio, 48, 10, 3-4.
67. Valerius Maximus, 8, 3, 1.
68. Valerius Maximus 8, 3.
69. Juvenal 6, 434ff; especially 445-447.
70. Martial, 11, 20.
71. Tacitus, *Dialogus de Oratoribus* 28-9. Suetonius, *Augustus* 3.
72. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 94; Asclepias of Mendes, *Theologumena* 94, 4. See Borg, *The First Christmas* p. 122.
73. Dio, 47, 7, 4-5.
74. See Appian, *Civil Wars* 5, 76; Plutarch, *Antony* 33,3.
75. Appian, *op. cit.* 5, 76, 93-5; Plutarch, *op. cit.*; 35, 1-4; Dio 48, 54, 1-5.
76. Dio 48, 54, 5.
77. Plutarch, *op. cit.* 53, 54, 1-2; Dio 49, 32, 4-5, 33, 3-4, 50, 3, 2.
78. Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 2, 3-4.
79. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.882-3. Donatus, *Life of Virgil* 32.

Chapter Five

1. Pliny, *NH* 10, 154; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 14, 2.
2. Tacitus, *Annals* 6, 51, 1.
3. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 6, 2-3; Dio, 54, 7, 2.
4. Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 319-20. Pliny, *NH* 3, 127; 14, 60; 17, 31.
5. Horace, *Odes* 3, 14.
6. Dio 48, 34, 3.
7. See above. Dio, 48, 34, 3.
8. Suetonius, *Galba* 1. Pliny, *op. cit.* 15, 136-7; Dio, 48, 52, 3-4; 63, 29, 3.
9. Dio 41, 39, 2; 43, 43, 1.
10. Propertius 4, 11, 55.
11. See above. Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 25, 52. Lucan, *de Bello Civile* 2, 326-80.
12. Dio 48, 44, 1-3.
13. Velleius Paterculus 2, 75, 3; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 5, 1, 2.
14. Suetonius, *Augustus* 69, 1; Tacitus, *op. cit.* Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam* 3, 4.
15. See above.
16. Dio 54, 7, 2.
17. *IG* 3, 316.
18. Strabo 14.
19. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 21, 3; Florus 2, 62; Dio 54, 9, 8; Strabo 15, 4, 73.
20. Dio 54, 9, 10; Strabo 15, 4, 79.
21. Donatus, *Vita Virgilii* 35.
22. Seneca, *De Clementia* 9; Dio, 54, 9, 3.
23. Soranus, *Gynaecology* 1, 34, 1.
24. *CIL* 6, 10320.
25. Suetonius, *Augustus* 72-74.
26. Plutarch, *Sulla* 3, 2. Dio 58, 2, 5; 56, 3. Suetonius, *Augustus* 69, 2.
27. Ovid, *Epistulae Ex Ponto* 3, 1, 114-8.
28. Seneca, *De Clementia* 1, 9; Dio, 55, 14-22.
29. Dio, 48, 34, 3; Suetonius, *op. cit.* 64; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2, 5, 1-10. Livina, Suetonius, *Caligula* 23.
30. Suetonius, *Augustus* 70-71.

31. Pliny, *HN* 3, 17; Martial 4, 18, 1; Dio, 55, 8, 4.
32. For Tatia see Thonemann, *The Women of Akmonia*; the translation of the inscription is by Thonemann.
33. *CIL*, 10, 810.
34. *CIL*, 10, 810.
35. *Pleket* 8G.
36. *Pleket* 19G.
37. Ovid *Fasti* 5, 148-58
38. Dio, 53, 30; Velleius Paterculus 2, 93; Dio 53, 31; 53, 32.
39. Dio, 53, 33, 4.
40. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.53. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 7.
41. Dio 54.18; Suetonius, *Augustus* 64; Dio, 54.31.
42. Suetonius *Tiberius* 7; Tacitus, *op. cit.*
43. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1.3.
44. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1, 10, 7; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 21, 4-7.
45. Ovid, *Fasti* 6, 637-8.
46. Velleius Paterculus, 2, 99,1; 2, 100, 3; Suetonius, *op. cit.* 10, 2; 11, 1; 12, 2; Dio, 55, 9, 8; 55, 9, 6.
47. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 22; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1.6. Dio 53, 33, 4; 55, 10A; 55, 32; 57, 3, 6.
48. Velleius Paterculus 2, 102, 1; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 3, 48; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 13, 15, 1; Pliny, *HN* 9, 118; Dio, 55, 11, 3.
49. Tacitus, *op.cit.* 1, 5; 4, 16. Dio 55, 22, 2; 56, 30. Velleius Paterculus 2, 130, 5.
50. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1, 3, 3; 4, 57, 3; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 21, 4-7; *Caligula* 4; Velleius Paterculus 2, 103, 2.
51. Velleius Paterculus 2, 123, 1; Suetonius, *Augustus* 98, 5-99,1; *Tiberius* 21, 1; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1, 5, 3-4; 13, 2; Dio 65, 30-31.
52. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1, 8, 5-6; Suetonius, *Augustus* 100, 2-4; Dio 56, 34, 1-4; 42, 46, 2.
53. Tacitus *op.cit.* 2, 42; 5, 1, 3; Suetonius *Tiberius* 8, 37, 4.
54. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 50. Dio, 57, 12, 5; also 55, 2, 4 and 8, 2.
55. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 2, 34; 4, 22. Dio, 57, 12.
56. *Idem* 2, 71. Dio 57, 18, 9.
57. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 2, 75; 3, 13.
58. Tacitus *op. cit.* 3, 36, 3.
59. Tacitus *op. cit.* 3, 15.
60. *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre* 6-12.
61. Seneca, *Cons. Marciam* 1; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 4, 34-35; Suetonius, *Augustus* 35, 2; *Tiberius* 61, 3; *Caligula* 16, 1; Dio 57, 24, 4.
62. Tacitus *op.cit.* 3, 1, 2-4.
63. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 2, 74; 3, 7; 2, 69.
64. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 4, 67; 4, 57. Dio, 57, 12.
65. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 3, 64; Dio 57, 3, 3.
66. See Treggiari, *Domestic Staff at Rome During the Julio-Claudian Period*, and *Jobs in the Household of Livia*.
67. Dio 48, 44, 3; Seneca, *Cons. Sap.* 11, 3; Statius, *Silvae* 2, 1, 72; 5, 5, 66; Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 1, 2, 7.
68. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 14, 2. Augustus' Greek letters: Suetonius, *Claudius* 4.
69. Pliny, *NH* 7, 75.
70. Cicero, *De Oratore* 1, 62.
71. Pliny, *op. cit.* 13, 74; 14, 11.
72. Velleius 2, 130, 5.
73. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 5, 1; Dio 58, 2; Suetonius, *op. cit.* 51. Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 4, 3. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 5, 1, 3.
74. Dio, 54, 16, 4. Velleius 2, 130, 5.

Chapter Six

1. Appian 5, 76.
2. Strabo 14, 5, 14.
3. Dio, 51, 15, 7. For details of Antonia's overseas possessions and their economies, see Kokkinos p.

4. Gaul: Dio 54, 35, 4; Spain: Suetonius, *Claudius* 1, 6. Tacitus, *Annals* 2, 43.
5. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 1, 3; Dio, 55, 1, 1. Strabo (7, 1, 3) says a riding accident was the cause of death, as does Valerius Maximus (5, 5, 3). Dio says he died of a disease (55, 1, 4) while Suetonius (*op. cit.* 1, 4), not unpredictably, goes for poisoning by Augustus.
6. Valerius Maximus 4, 3, 3.
7. Suetonius, *Caligula* 3, 1-2; Pliny, *NH* 8, 42; Ovid *Fasti* 1, 23-4; *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, 4, 8, 67; Suetonius, *Claudius* 41, 3; 41, 1.
8. Hinted at by Tacitus, *op. cit.* 3, 3. He cites other reasons why she may not have attended—grief or illness.
9. Suetonius, *Caligula* 10, 1; cf 24, 1.
10. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18, 181-2; Dio, 65, 14, 1. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 65, 1.
11. See Juvenal's excoriating satire, 10, 61-9.
12. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 4, 3.
13. Josephus, *op. cit.* 18, 236; Suetonius, *op. cit.* 23, 2; 24, 1; 29, 1.
14. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 23.
15. Ovid, *Consolatio ad Liviam* 300; Josephus, *op. cit.* 18, 180; Plutarch, *Antony* 87, 3; Valerius Maximus, 4, 3, 3.
16. Pliny, *NH* 7, 18. Spitting: a significant peculiarity of nature according to Pliny.
17. Josephus, *op. cit.* 18, 164-7; 18, 202-3.
18. Suetonius, *Claudius* 41, 1-2.
19. Pliny, *op. cit.* 9, 172.
20. *Ibid* 3, 2.
21. Dio, 58, 11, 7.
22. *IG* 14, 734; *CIL* 6, 5536.

Chapter Seven

1. Dio Cassius, 48, 34, 3. For Scribonia, see Fantham, *Julia Augusti* pp. 17-19.
2. See above. Suetonius, *Augustus* 64; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2, 5, 1-10.
3. For more, see Chrystal, *Women in Ancient Rome*.
4. Mark Antony made Antyllus (the Archer) his official heir; Octavian had him executed in 30 BC, when he was seventeen.
5. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 63. Dio discredits the Dacian connection.
6. Dio 53, 30; Velleius Paterculus 2, 93.
7. Octavian's affairs: Suetonius, *Augustus* 62, 63, 69; Tacitus, *Annals* 1, 10, 5. Marriage to Agrippa: Dio, 54, 6.
8. Nicolaus of Damascus, *Fragmenta der Griechischein Historiker* 2 A: 421-2; Josephus, *Antiquities* 16, 2, 2.
9. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 7; *Augustus*, 65. See above.
10. Dio 54, 31.
11. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 7, 3; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1, 53.
12. Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae* 4, 6; *idem*, *De Beneficiis* 6.32. Pliny *NH* 21, 8-9.
13. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 11. Velleius Paterculus 2, 100.
14. Dio Cassius 55.10. Suetonius, *Augustus* 65; Ovid, *Fasti* 2, 127-32.
15. Pliny *NH* 7, 149; Suetonius, *op. cit.*
16. *Tristia* 2, 207.
17. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 64-5.
18. Dio 55, 10.
19. Velleius Paterculus, *op. cit.*
20. Seneca, *op. cit.*; Pliny, *op. cit.*
21. Macrobius 2, 5, 1-6.
22. We must beware, as ever, of over-estimating the frequency of adultery just because we hear about it more than monogamous marriages (the norm). See Aulus Gellius, 11, 10, 23.

Chapter Eight

1. Tacitus, *Annals* 1, 33.
2. Tacitus *op. cit.* 1, 41.
3. Dio, 57, 5.
4. Tacitus *op. cit.* 1, 69.
5. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1, 69, 2; 1.33.5; 1, 30-44. Aulus Caecina Severus 3, 33.
6. *Senatus Consultum de Cnaeo Pisone Patre* 137-9. The translation is by Elaine Fantham, *Julia Augusta* p. 121.
7. Tacitus *op. cit.* 2, 71.
8. Dio, 57, 2, 7; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 1, 12.
9. Dio, 58.3; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 6, 23; 6, 25; 6, 52-53.
10. Dio, 58, 3.
11. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 4, 12.
12. Tacitus *op. cit.* 4, 2.
13. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 43-45.
14. Tacitus, *op. cit.*, 4, 12.
15. *Ibid.*, 4, 8.
16. *Ibid.*, 13, 3, 3.
17. *Ibid.*, 4, 52, 3. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 53. The translation from the Greek is by Robert Graves, *Suetonius: The Twelve Caesars*.
18. Tacitus *op. cit.* 4, 54.
19. Dio, 57, 19, 22; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 4, 52; Suetonius, *op. cit.*
20. Dio, 58, 4.
21. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 4, 67, 5-6.
22. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 5, 3.
23. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 6, 23-5. Suetonius, *ibid.*
24. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 54
25. Cf. Suetonius, *Caligula* 15, where he collects the ashes.
26. Tacitus *op. cit.* 6, 25.
27. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 6, 22.
28. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 53. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 4, 71.
29. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 23.
30. Pliny NH 7, 46; Tacitus, Tacitus *op. cit.* 2, 69; 4, 53.
31. For examples of this, see Chrystal, *op. cit.*

Chapter Nine

1. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 60, 22, 2; Suetonius, *Claudius* 17.
2. Dio, 60, 12, 15.
3. Juvenal, 6, 117. Propertius, 3, 11. Dio 60, 31; translation is by Cary, *op. cit.*
4. Josephus, *Antiquities* 19, 102. 251.
5. Dio, 60, 14, 2-4; 60, 27, 4; 60, 18, 3.
6. *Idem* 60, 27, 2-4; 29, 4-6, 6a; Suetonius *op. cit.* 29, 2.
7. For the originals of the *Lusus Troiae* see Virgil *Aeneid*, 5, 553-603. Tacitus, *Annals* 11, 1, 3; Dio 60, 27, 2-4.
8. Seneca, *Dialogus* 11, 5, 2. Dio 60, 31, 2.
9. Suetonius, *Vitellius*. 2, 5. For Lucius Vitellius' career under Claudius, see Suetonius *Vitellius* 2, 4. For Messalina's importance in the court see Seneca, *Octavia* 947.
10. Tacitus *op. cit.* 11, 26, 1.
11. Tacitus *op. cit.* 11, 26, 3.
12. Tacitus *op. cit.* 11, 27.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 11, 26-38; Dio, 60, 31; Suetonius, *Claudius* 36-37; 39.
15. Juvenal 6, 118ff.
16. Juvenal 6, 115-132; 10, 329-345.
17. Pliny NH 10, 172.
18. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 11, 12-13; Dio 60, 18.
19. *Octavia* 609-11.
20. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 11, 35, 4-7; 11, 36, 1-5; Dio 60, 18, 1-2; 31, 1-5.

Chapter Ten

1. Pliny, *NH* 8, 145.
2. Dio 63; Tacitus, *Annals* 14, 9, 1.
3. Suetonius, *Nero* 5.
4. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 6.
5. Pliny, *op. cit.* 7, 46.
6. Suetonius, *ibid.*
7. Philo, *Legatio* 10-13, 232, 356 and Suetonius, *Caligula* 13 for the accession of Caligula. Oaths: Suetonius, *op. cit.* 15, 3; Dio 58, 2, 8. Temple of Divus Augustus: Dio, 59, 7, 4. Claudius: Suetonius *op. cit.* 6; 23.
8. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 24. Josephus, *Antiquities* 19, 204; Dio, 59, 11, 1; 22, 6.
9. Dio 59.
10. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 25; 33.
11. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 59.
12. Suetonius, *Galba* 5.
13. Lepida: *idem*, *Galba*, 5. Tigellinus: Dio, 59, 23, 9; Scholiast on Juvenal *Satires* 1, 155.
14. Pliny, *NH* 33; Dio, 61, 33, 3.
15. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 57.
16. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 14, 11.
17. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 14, 2, 4; Seneca, *Octavia*, 141-3.
18. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 1.
19. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 12, 22
20. Pliny, *NH* 9, 117; Suetonius, *Claudius* 27.
21. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 5-7.
22. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 5.
23. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 29; 39; Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 1.
24. Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis Claudii*. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 3.
25. Dio, 61, 32.
26. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 25.
27. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 12, 41.
28. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 12, 27; 12, 26; 12, 42.
29. Josephus, *op. cit.* 18, 31; 143.
30. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 35-37
31. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 42.
32. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 59, 4.
33. Phlegon, *Miracles* 7.
34. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 64. Suetonius, *Claudius* 43, 46.
35. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 66-69.
36. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 66.
37. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 1; 2. Dio 60, 34.
38. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 2; 5; 36, 4, 2; Suetonius, *op. cit.* 34, 1. Dio, 61, 3.
39. Dio, 61, 3.
40. Dio, 61, 7, 1; Suetonius, *op. cit.* 28.
41. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 11.
42. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 12-14.
43. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 14.
44. Tacitus seems to have forgotten that we have already met Locusta. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 15-17. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 33.
45. Seneca, *Octavia* 17-1.
46. See above p. 135.
47. Tacitus, *op. cit.*
48. Tacitus *op. cit.* 13, 18-19. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 34.
49. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 45.
50. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 12, 28; Dio 62, 28
51. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 13, 36.
52. Tacitus *op. cit.* 13, 20-22.
53. Dio 61, 12.

54. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 14, 12.
55. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 14, 3, 1. Dio Cassius (63, 12 and 13) says that Acerronia drowned and mentions nothing about Agrippina being rescued; instead he claims she swam all the way to shore unaided. Dio prefers a vessel where the bottom opened up while at sea; Agrippina duly fell into the water when exactly that happened.
56. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 14, 1-2. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 28. Translation of Dio is by Earnest Cary in the *Loeb* edition (1921-1929). Dio, *op. cit.* 62, 27.
57. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 34. Dio 61, 12; 13. Translation, Cary *op. cit.*
58. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 14, 3-6.
59. *Idem*, *op. cit.* 14, 7-8. Suetonius, *op. cit.* Dio, 61, 13; translation, Cary *op. cit.*
60. Seneca, *Oedipus* 1024-39. For more on this see Whitton, *Agrippina's Last Words*.
61. Suetonius, *op. cit.* Dio, 61, 14; translation, Cary *op. cit.*
62. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 14, 9-13.
63. On coming of age, a Roman assumed the *toga virilis* and had his beard shaved off. Cf Dio, 61, 19.
64. Dio 62, 134.
65. Tacitus, *op. cit.* 14, 61.
66. *Ibid*, *op. cit.* 16, 6; 15, 38. Dio 63, 13.
67. Suetonius, *Nero* 35, 3.
68. Suetonius, *op. cit.* 46. Dio, 61, 14; translation, Cary *op. cit.*
69. Dio, *op. cit.* 61, 17.
70. Juvenal, 6, 434-447.
71. Suetonius, *Otho* 10, 2.

Primary Sources

Greek [Gk] and Latin [L] authors cited:

~~Andriyos I~~ (first half AD 4th century) [L]

Bebrham Castle AD 1st century–AD 160+) [Gk]

Aristophanes (ca. 446 BCE – ca. 386 BCE) [Gk]

Alejo José G. Sison (fl. AD 10?) [Gk]

Asconius Quintus Asconius Pedianus (c. 9 BC–c. AD 76) [L]

Athenaeus of Naucratis

(fl. end AD second century) [Gk]

~~Augustine of Hippo~~ (AD 354–AD 430) [L]

 $\text{Re}[\text{G}_{\text{set}}] = (6B + B_{CA} - A_d) \cdot S_{ti4} [L]$

Nodus Cellinse (c. AD 125–after AD 180) [L]

~~DeiBæKaesar(100 BC–44 BC) [L]~~

Catullus (c. 84–54 BC) [L]

~~They Sustain Women And Children be Taken as Wives.~~

Cicero 106-43 BC *Nullares; Ad O.*

Fratrem; Brutus; De Divitatione;

De Domo Sua; De Finibus; De

Haruspicum Responsis; De

Legibus; De Officiis; De Oratore;

De Re Publica; In Catilinam;

Oratio de Doma Sua; Oratio pro

Sexto Roscio; Philippics; Pro

Caelio; Pro Fonteio; Pro Murena;

Tusculanae Disputationes; In

Verrem; Pro Milone

~~Chen~~ ~~China~~ ~~Africa~~ ~~Enslaved~~ ~~by~~ (c. 122 BC) [L]

Diocletian (reigned AD 155–235) [Gk]

Bibbithus Siculus (fl. ca 60–30 BC) [Gk]

Diogenes Laertius (after EnAide 200) [Gk]

Philosophers

Composition of Halicarpus

$$(\cos \theta_1 \cos \theta_2 + \sin \theta_1 \sin \theta_2) [\text{Gk}]$$

Dionatus Vigili (AD 350) [L]

Annulus (c. 239 BC–c. 169) [L]

Buripides (c. 480 BC–406) [Gk]

Eostomum (fl. late 2nd century AD) [L]

Epitaxial growth of RuO_4 on HfO_2/Si (AD) [L]

Hertodian (the AD 170e-240n, t/Gk]

Death of Marcus Aurelius

Herodotus (c. 484–425 BC) [Gk]

Hovakes (c. 618–580 BC) [L]

Jerome (AD 4th century) [L]

Josephus (AD 37–c. 100) [Gk]

Juvénal (fl. early AD 2nd century) [L]

Lactantius (c. AD 240–c. 320), [L]

Alvy (59 BC–AD 17) [L]

Balam (AD 39–65) [L]

Emilius (c. AD 180–102) [L]

Macrobius (fl. 5th century AD) [L]

Magnethio (3rd century BC) [Gk]

Phigian (c. AD 40–100) [L]

Mimicius Felix (fl. AD 200?) [L]

Nepos (d. 107 BC) [L]

Prologue to the Lives of Foreign Generals

Nicodemus of Damascus (c. 64 BC)

Historiker

Gissius (Agai AD 375–443)

Opich (c. 60 BC–AD 7) [L]

Tristia; Metamorphoses

Batyonius (c. AD 27–AD 66), [L]

Phidias (c. 200 BC–AD 40) [Gk]

Genesis; De Specialibus Legibus;

Legatio ad Gaium

Phlegon of Tralles (fl. 2nd century AD) [Gk]

Pythian (c. 422–443 BC) [Gk]

Blattus (c. 254–184 BC) [L]

Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) [L]

Pliny the Younger (c. AD 61–113) [L]

Rhetorica (AD 41–25) [Gk]

Brutus; Caesar; Camillus; Cato

Maior; Cato Minor; Cicero; Gaius

Gracchus; Lucullus; Moralia;

Numa; Quaestiones Romanae;

Sulla; Tiberius Gracchus;

Alcibiades

Polyagrus (fl. 2nd century AD) [Gk]

Polybius (c. 204–122 BC) [Gk]

Propertius (born 50 to 45–15 BC) [L]

Quintilian (c. AD 35–90) [L]

Ballust (c. 86–35 BC) [L]

Scholiast on Juvenal (late AD 4th century)

Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre (AD 20) [L]

~~Schekyla~~, (Ad 4 BC to AD 65) [L]
Apocolocyntosis Claudii; *De Beneficiis*; *De Brevitate Vitae*;
De Clementia; *De Constantia Sapientia*; *Octavia* (attributed);
Oedipus
~~Servius~~ (late AD 4th century) [L]
~~Silius~~ Italicus (c. AD 28–c. 103) [L]
~~Silius~~ Italicus (c. AD 28–c. 103) [L]
~~Sophocles~~ (c. 497–406 BC) [Gk]
~~Soranus~~ (flg AD 100) [Gk]
~~Statius~~ (c. AD 45–c. 96) [L]
~~Strabo~~ (c. 64 BC–c. AD 24) [Gk]
~~Augustus~~ (c. 63 BC–AD 14) [L];
Domitian; *Galba*; *Julius Caesar*;
Life of Horace; *Nero*; *Otho*;
Tiberius; *Vitellius*; *Vespasian*
~~Agrippa~~ (AD 56–19) [L]
Oratoribus; *Germania*; *Histories*
~~Elgulus~~ (c. 55–19 BC) [L]
~~Tiberius~~ (c. 42 BC–AD 37) [L]
~~Digian~~ (c. AD 170–228) [L]
~~Valerius Maximus~~ (AD 14–23) [L]
~~Varro~~ (c. 116 BC–27 BC) [L],
~~Helius~~ ~~Pteronius~~ (c. 19 BC–c. AD 31) [L]
~~Nergild~~ (70–19 BC) [L]
~~Florianus~~ (AD 490) [Gk]

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AC *Antiquité Classique*
AJA *American Journal of Archaeology*
AJAH *American Journal of Ancient History*
AJP *American Jnl of Philology*
AMRW *Antike Weg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*
Angl *Annuaire classique*
AB *Algemeen van de Vereeniging tot Bevordering der Kennis van de Antike Beschaving*
BICS *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*
BM *Bibliotheca Medica et Mediaevalia*
CB *Classical Bulletin*
CJ *Classical Journal*
CI *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Berlin 1863*
CA *Classical Antiquity*
CP *Classical Philology*
CR *Classical Review*
CSA *Classica Studies in Classical Antiquity*
CW *Classical World*
EMC *Études du Monde Classique*
GR *Greece and Rome*
HN *Historia Naturalis, Pliny the Elder*
HSCP *Hesperia Studies in Classical Philology*
IG *Inscriptiones Graecae*
IC *International Jnl of Classical Tradition*
JACT *Journal of the Association of Classical Teachers*
JHS *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*
JWCI *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*
LCM *Liverpool Classical Monthly*
LEC *Études Classiques*
PCPS *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*
EP *Epigraphica, Epigraphica II, Leiden 1969*
VS *Proceedings of the Virgil Society*
RBPH *Revue Belge de Philologie et D'histoire*
RE *Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*
EA *Annales des Etudes Anciennes*

~~RE~~ue des Etudes Latines
~~RE~~ue Historique
~~RhM~~nisches Museum fur Philologie
~~RPh~~ue de Philologie
~~S~~ymbolae Osloensis
~~TAPhA~~ctions of the Proceedings of the American Philological Asscn
~~Tijds~~chrift Voor Rechtsgeschiedenis
~~UBM~~rsity of Birmingham Historical Journal
~~W~~ener Studien
~~ZPE~~chrift fur Papyrologie und Epigraphik

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1. The extent of Roman power in the second century BC; originally published in Hammerton, J. A., (ed.), *Universal History of the World Vol. 3*, (London, 1930), p. 1688.



2. Virginia on her way to school, blithely unaware of the fate that awaits her. Her stalker, Appius Claudius (on the right), had designs on her chastity (*pudicitia*); this compelled her father to kill her in order to avoid the disgrace (*stuprum*) this would bring. Her tragic death led to the restoration of the Republic and the end of the decemvirate in around 449 BC. This image was originally published in *Lays of Ancient Rome* by T. B. Macaulay (London 1842).



3. *School of the Vestal Virgins* by Hector Leroux (1829–1900). The Vestals are receiving instruction on how to keep the sacred flame burning. This image is from *The Project Gutenberg Book of Myths of Greece and Rome* by H. A. Guerber (New York 1893).



4. A dignified Cornelia walking through the streets of Rome with her two sons, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. Originally published in *The Greatest Nations: Rome*.



5. *Fulvia with the Head of Cicero* by Pavel Svedonsky (1849–1904). Fulvia Flacca Bambula (c. 83–40 BC), sadistically pricks the tongue of the decapitated Cicero after his proscription and execution in 43 BC. This painting is now located in the State Open Air Museum of History and Architecture, in Russia.



6. Porcia Catonis (c. 70–43 BC), the daughter of Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis and his first wife Atilia (later a mistress of Julius Caesar). Porcia was the second wife of Brutus, one of Caesar's assassins. Plutarch describes her as naturally affectionate, conversant with philosophy, spirited, sensible, courageous, and beautiful. This is a detail from the Cato and Portia sculptures now held in the Vatican Museum, Rome. The image was originally published in A. Hekler, *Greek and Roman Portraits*, (London 1912). Porcia's beauty is well portrayed in the sculpture.



7. Antonia Minor, as Ceres, in the Louvre.



8. *Lesbia and Her Sparrow* by Sir Edward John Poynter (1836–1919), painted in 1907. Inspired by Catullus: 'You ask, Lesbia, how many kisses are more than enough for me.' (*'quaeris, quot mihi basiationes tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque'*).



9. Terentia—wife of Cicero.



10. Ingres's *Virgil Reading Verses from his Aeneid to Augustus, his wife Livia, and his sister Octavia*. Now in the *Musée des Beaux-Arts*, Brussels, Belgium. Octavia faints when Virgil reads out '*tu Marcellus eris*', celebrating her assassinated late son, Marcellus. (1819)



11. *Roman Women Offering their Jewellery in Defence of the State* by Vincenzo Camuccini (c. 1825). (Copyright Glasgow Museums)



12. In order to promote his policy of moral regeneration and a return to traditional values, Augustus boasted that everyone in the Imperial household was a competent worker of wool—the hallmark of a good *matrona*. Here we see Livia organising a weaving session. The drawing is by André Castaigne; it was originally published in *Women of the Caesars* by G. Ferrero (London 1911).



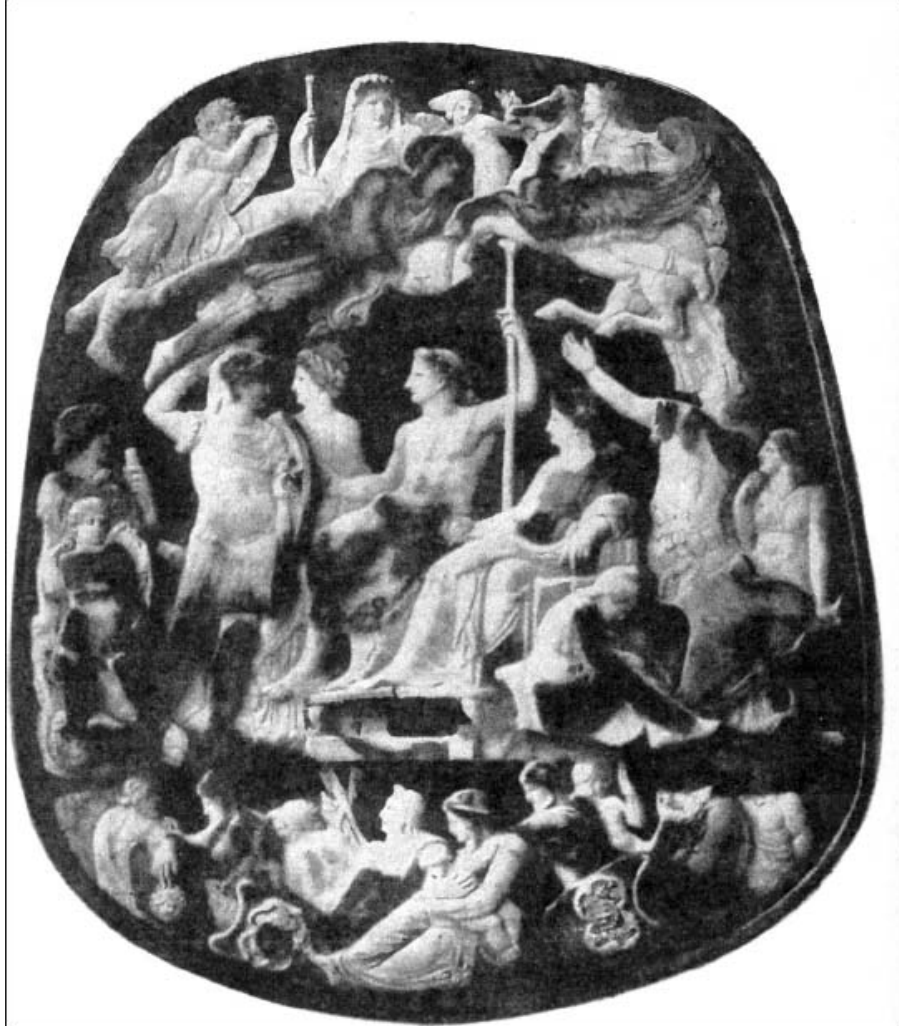
13. A marble bust of Livia dating from around 1 BC, now located in the *Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* museum in Copenhagen. This image was originally published in *Classical Sculpture* by A. W. Lawrence (London 1929). Colour can still be seen in the eye painting and in the hair—or, more likely, the wig, as the style does not conform to her usual simple style at this time. The sculptor has ‘airbrushed’ out the wrinkles Livia would have had.



14. A less-formal bust of Livia, this time in bronze; it is now in the Louvre. This image was originally published in A. Hekler, *Greek and Roman Portraits* (London 1912). Livia is wearing her hair in the *nodus* style characteristic of the *matrona*—simple and unpretentious, with a roll over the forehead.



15. Antonia Minor, born 31 January 36 BC in Rome. She was the younger of the two daughters of Mark Antony and Octavia; she was Augustus's niece, sister-in-law to Tiberius, the paternal grandmother of Caligula and Agrippina the Younger, the mother of Claudius, and both maternal great-grandmother and paternal great-aunt to Nero.



16. The largest classical cameo known, depicting Augustus surrounded by his family. Tiberius, as Jupiter, is seated in the centre; Livia is to his left, as Ceres. Germanicus and his mother, Antonia, stand in front of them. This cameo is now located in the *Cabinet des Medailles* in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Paris; it was originally featured in G. Ferrero's *Women of the Caesars* (London 1911).



OCTAVIA
PORPHYRY BUST IN THE LOUVRE

17. Octavia—a porphyry bust now in the Louvre. This image was originally published in A. Hekler, *Greek and Roman Portraits* (London 1912).



From the collection of Professor G. N. Olcott

A BRONZE SESTERTIUS (SLIGHTLY ENLARGED) SHOWING THE SISTERS OF CALIGULA (AGRIPPINA, DRUSILLA, AND JULIA LIVILLA) ON ONE SIDE AND GERMANICUS ON THE OTHER SIDE



Enlarged from the original owned by Professor G. N. Olcott

A BRONZE SESTERTIUS WITH THE HEAD OF AGRIPPINA THE ELDER, DAUGHTER OF AGRIPPA AND JULIA, THE DAUGHTER OF AUGUSTUS

She was the wife of Germanicus, and their daughter, Agrippina the younger, was the mother of the Emperor Nero

18. Coins showing Agrippina the Younger (top), Drusilla, and Julia Livilla, and Agrippina the Elder (below). This image originally appeared in G. Ferrero's *Women of the Caesars* (London 1911).



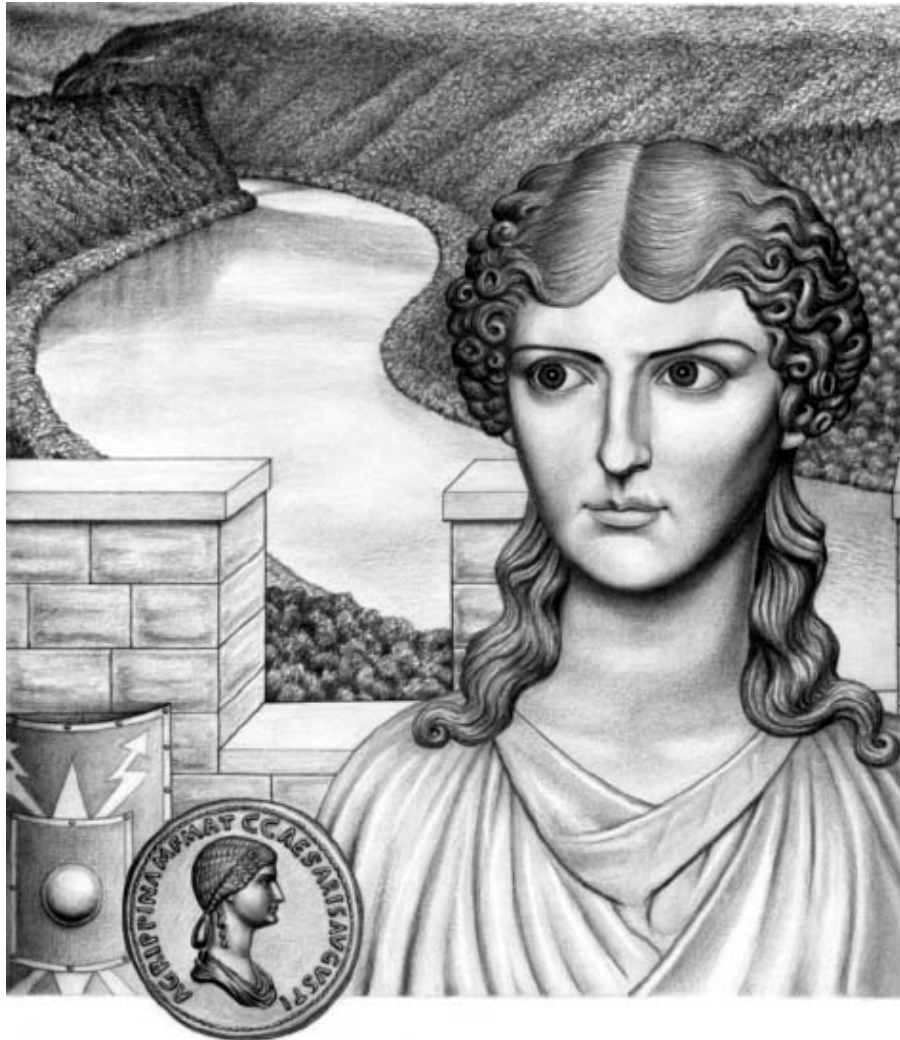
19. Julia, the wayward daughter of Augustus who was exiled to the remote island of Pandateria. This bust is now in the Museum Chiaramonti, in the Vatican; this image was originally published in *The Empresses of Rome* by J. McCabe (London 1911).



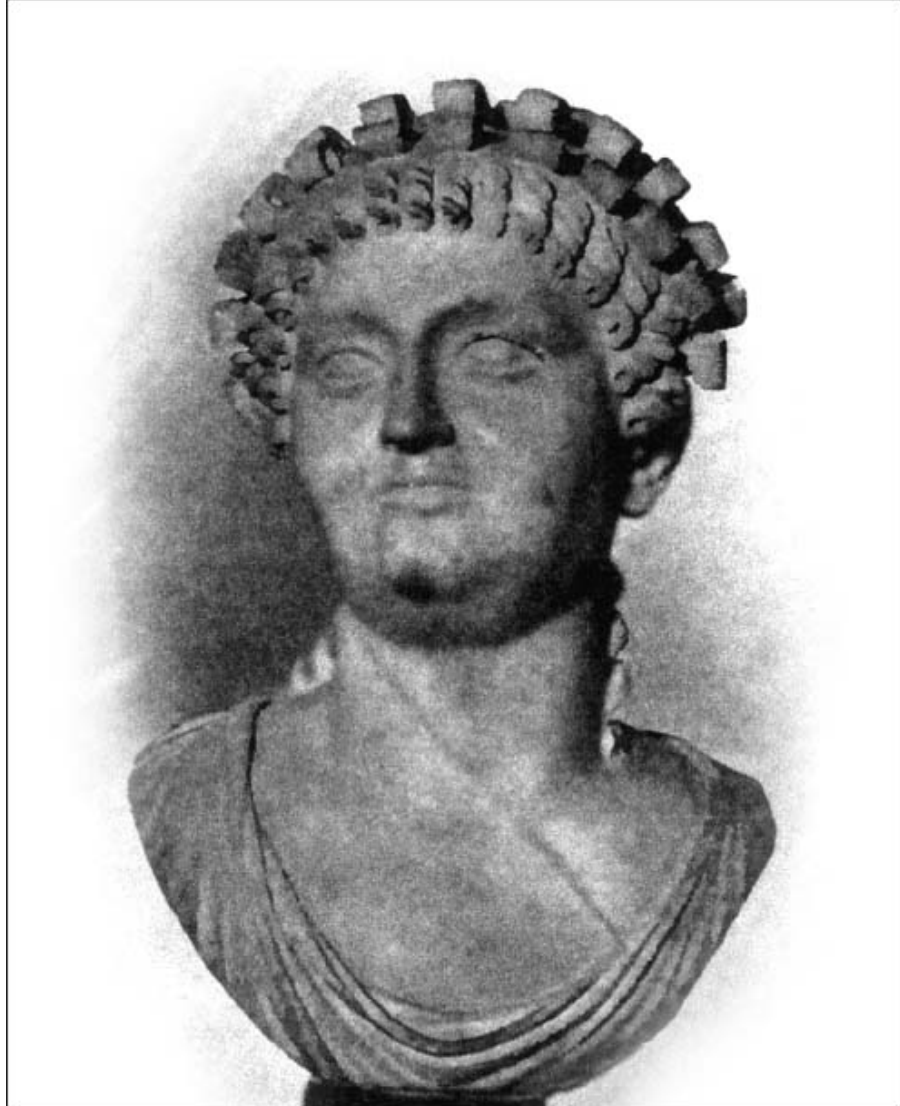
20. Julia, with the kind permission of the Musée Saint-Raymond, Toulouse (© J.-F. Peiré).



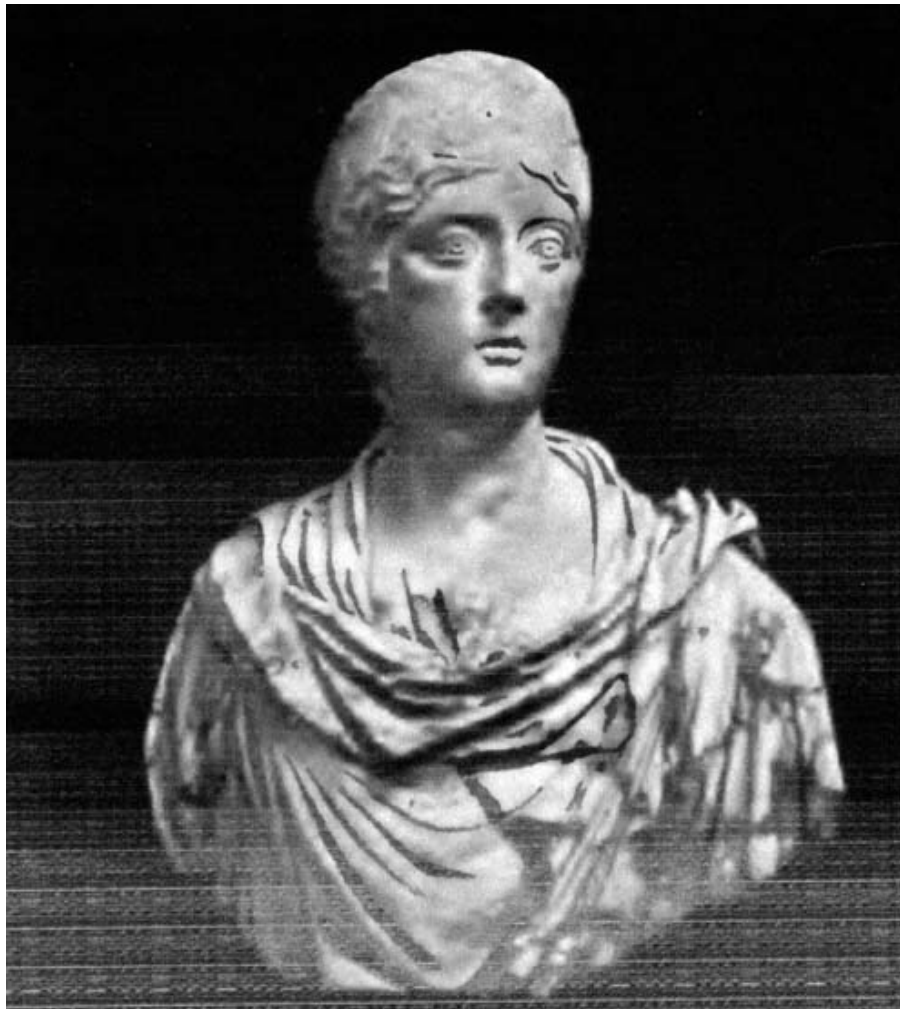
21. Agrippina the Elder—this bust is now in the *Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* museum in Copenhagen. It was originally published in *Classical Sculpture* by A.W. Lawrence (London 1929). The bust may have been made after Agrippina's death, in a tribute to her memory from her son, Caligula. Lawrence suggests that the tilt of the neck may be due to a partial paralysis.



22. Thanks to Jasper Burns for his permission to reproduce this image of Agrippina I, originally published in his *Great Women of Imperial Rome*. It shows Agrippina on the Rhine fortifications, where she saved the legions of Germanicus, her husband, by her formidable military skills. It is based on a sculpture in the Archaeological Institute in Rome. The coin is a bronze sestertius, minted by Caligula.



23. A haughty-looking Messalina, third wife of Claudius, from a bust in the Capitoline Museum. This image was originally published in G. Ferrero's *Women of the Caesars* (London 1911).



24. Poppaea Sabina—in Rome's Capitoline Museum. This photograph first appeared in *The Empresses of Rome* by J. McCabe (London 1911). The ambitious and lascivious Poppaea was married to Nero; he kicked her to death while she was pregnant.



25. *The Murder of Agrippina the Younger* by André Castaigne; this originally appeared in G. Ferrero's *Women of the Caesars* (London 1911).



26. A bust of Agrippina the Younger, now located in the Naples National Archaeological Museum. This photograph was originally published in *The Empresses of Rome* by J. McCabe (London 1911).



27. This bust of Agrippina the Younger is now in Copenhagen's *Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* museum. It originally appeared in *The Universal History of the World Volume 3*, edited by J. A. Hammerton (London 1930).



28. *Arria and Paetus*, by Jean-Baptiste Theodon and Pierre Lapuatre. This sculpture was completed between 1685–1695; it now stands in the Louvre and shows Arria trying to convince her husband that his impending suicide (as ordered by Claudius) will not be painful by stabbing herself—‘*Non dolet, Paete!*’



29. The Hague Cameo. This depicts Claudius, Messalina, and their two children, Claudia Octavia and Britannicus. This image originally appeared in G. Ferrero's, *The Women of the Caesars* (London, 1911).



30. Agrippina The Younger



31. Livilla, wife of Drusus. This is a marble statue found in Samos, and is now in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.



32. A statue of a mourning barbarian woman—the sculptor must have been well aware of the fate that befell women sold into slavery by the Romans, as the look of resigned sorrow and anguish says it all. This sculpture stands in the *Loggia dei Lanzi* in Florence. Tacitus tells us a lot about German barbarian women in his *Germania*.